FOG 50270 9

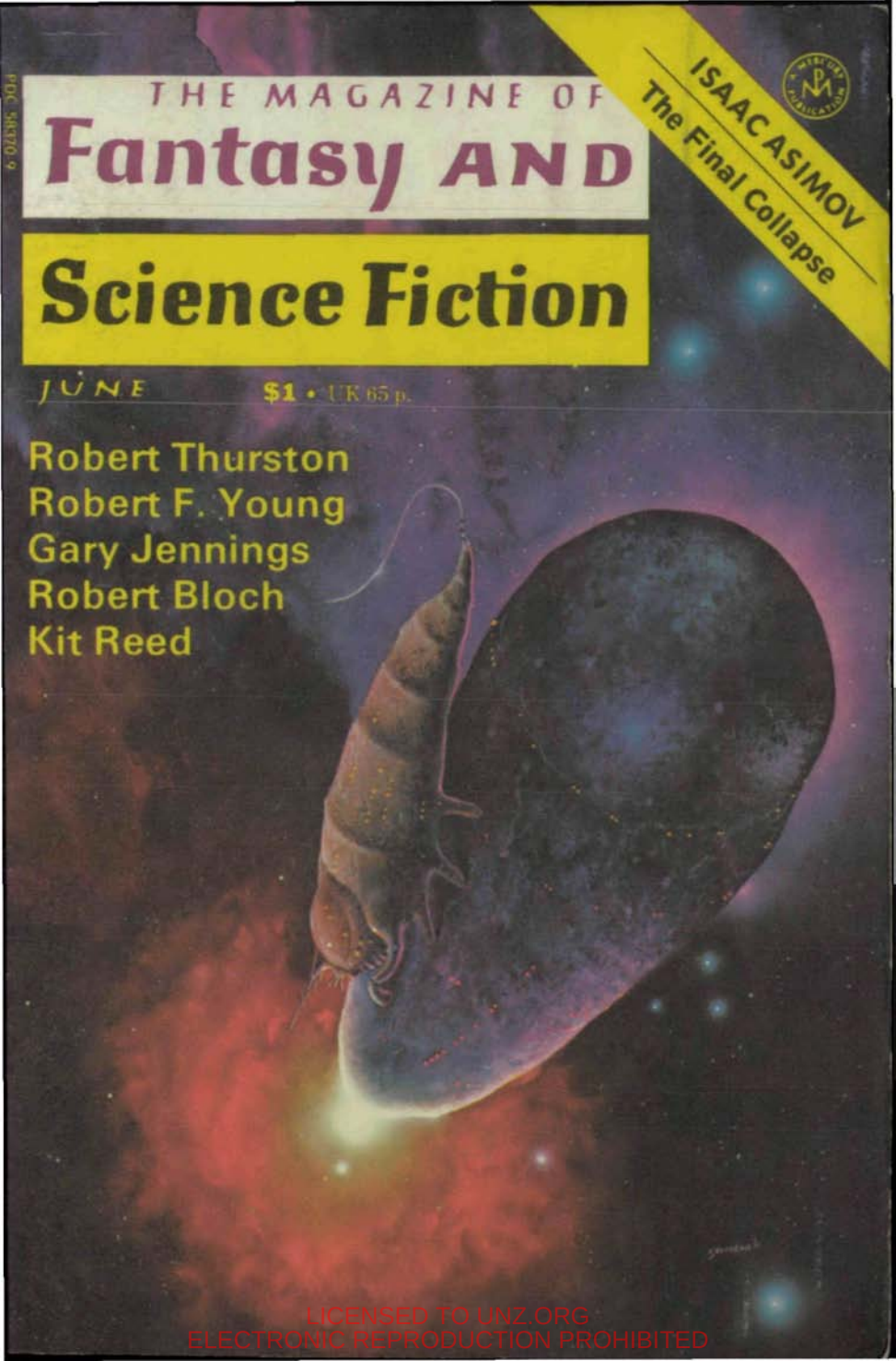
THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy AND Science Fiction

ISAAC ASIMOV
The Final Collapse

JUNE $1 • UK 65p.

Robert Thurston
Robert F. Young
Gary Jennings
Robert Bloch
Kit Reed



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fantasy and Science Fiction

Including Venture Science Fiction

JUNE • 28th YEAR OF PUBLICATION

NOVELETS

THE MARS SHIP	**ROBERT THURSTON**	**39**
NOT WITH A BANG BUT A BLEEP	**GARY JENNINGS**	**139**

SHORT STORIES

NINA	**ROBERT BLOCH**	**4**
THE STAR EEL	**ROBERT F. YOUNG**	**22**
THE HOLDOUTS	**KIT REED**	**80**
THE HORSE LORD	**LISA TUTTLE**	**90**
THE FINAL CLOSE	**J. P. DIXON**	**103**
THE EXILED, THE HUNTED	**GEORGE GUTHRIDGE**	**121**

DEPARTMENTS

BOOKS	**ALGIS BUDRYS**	**13**
AN UNSOLICITED SUBMISSION (verse)	**DEBORAH CRAWFORD**	**21**
FILMS: Jolly Juvenalia	**BAIRD SEARLES**	**36**
CARTOON	**GAHAN WILSON**	**79**
SCIENCE: The Final Collapse	**ISAAC ASIMOV**	**111**
INDEX TO VOLUME 52		**162**

Cover by Rick Sternbach for "The Star Eel"

Edward L. Ferman, EDITOR & PUBLISHER — Isaac Asimov, SCIENCE COLUMNIST
Dale Farrell, CIRCULATION MANAGER — Audrey Ferman, BUSINESS MANAGER
Anne W. Burke, ASSISTANT EDITOR

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 52; No. 6, Whole No. 313, June 1977. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc. at $1.00 per copy. Annual subscription $10.00; $11.00 in Canada and Mexico, $12.00 in other foreign countries. Postmaster: send form 3579 to Fantasy and Science Fiction, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Publication office, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Second class postage paid at Cornwall, Conn. 06753 and at additional mailing offices.

Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 1977 by Mercury Press, Inc. All rights, including translations into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope. The publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here is yet another treat from the master of the contemporary chiller. And speaking of chills, Robert Bloch's latest book is a collection of scary stories just published by Doubleday and titled COLD CHILLS.

Nina

by ROBERT BLOCH

After the love-making Nolan needed another drink.

He fumbled for the bottle beside the bed, gripping it with a sweaty hand. His entire body was wet and clammy, and his fingers shook as they unscrewed the cap. For a moment Nolan wondered if he was coming down with another bout of fever. Then, as the harsh heat of the rum scalded his stomach, he realized the truth.

Nina had done this to him.

Nolan turned and glanced at the girl who lay beside him. She stared up through the shadows with slitted eyes unblinking above high cheekbones, her thin brown body relaxed and immobile. Hard to believe that only moments ago this same body had been a writhing, wriggling coil of insatiable appetite, gripping and enfolding him until he was drained and spent.

He held the bottle out to her. "Have a drink?"

She shook her head, eyes hooded and expressionless, and then Nolan remembered that she didn't speak English. He raised the bottle and drank again, cursing himself for his mistake.

It had been a mistake, he realized that now, but Darlene would never understand. Sitting there safe and snug in the apartment in Trenton, she couldn't begin to know what he'd gone through for her sake — hers and little Robbie's. Robert Emmett Nolan II, nine weeks old now, his son, whom he'd never seen. That's why he'd taken the job, signed on with the company for a year. The money was good, enough to keep Darlene in comfort and tide them over after he got back. She couldn't have come with him, not while she was carrying the kid, so he came alone, figuring no sweat.

No sweat. That was a laugh. All he'd done since he got here was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sweat. Patrolling the plantation at sunup, loading cargo all day for the boats that went downriver, squinting over paperwork while night closed down on the bungalow to imprison him behind a wall of jungle darkness. And at night the noises came — the hum of insect hordes, the bellow of caimans, the snorting snuffle of peccary, the ceaseless chatter of monkeys intermingled with the screeching of a million mindless birds.

So he'd started to drink. First the good bourbon from the company's stock, then the halfway-decent trade gin, and now the cheap rum.

As Nolan set the empty bottle down he heard the noise he'd come to dread worst of all — the endless echo of drums from the huts huddled beside the riverbank below. Miserable wretches were at it again. No wonder he had to drive them daily to fulfil the company's quota. The wonder was that they did anything at all after spending every night wailing to those damned drums.

Of course it was Moises who did the actual driving; Nolan couldn't even chew them out properly because they were too damned dumb to understand plain English.

Like Nina, here.

Again Nolan looked down at the girl who lay curled beside him on the bed, silent and sated. She wasn't sweating; her skin was curiously cool to the touch, and in her eyes was a mystery.

It was the mystery that Nolan had sensed the first time he saw her staring at him across the village compound three days ago. At first he thought she was one of the company people — somebody's wife, daughter, sister. That afternoon, when he returned to the bungalow, he caught her staring at him again at the edge of the clearing. So he asked Moises who she was, and Moises didn't know. Apparently she'd just arrived a day or two before, paddling a crude catamaran downriver from somewhere out of the denser jungle stretching a thousand miles beyond. She had no English, and according to Moises, she didn't speak Spanish or Portuguese either. Not that she'd made any attempts to communicate; she kept to herself, sleeping in the catamaran moored beside the bank across the river and not even venturing into the company store by day to purchase food.

"Indio," Moises said, pronouncing the word with all the contempt of one in whose veins ran a ten-percent admixture of the proud blood of the *conquistadores.* "Who are we to know the way of savages?" He shrugged.

Nolan had shrugged, too, and dismissed her from his mind. But that night as he lay on his bed, lis-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tening to the pounding of the drums, he thought of her again and felt a stirring in his loins.

She came to him then, almost as though the stirring had been a silent summons, came like a brown shadow gliding out of the night. Soundlessly she entered, and swiftly she shed her single garment as she moved across the room to stand staring down at him on the bed. Then, as she sank upon his nakedness and encircled his thighs, the stirring in his loins became a throbbing and the pounding in his head drowned out the drums.

In the morning she was gone, but on the following night she returned. It was then that he'd called her Nina — it wasn't her name, but he felt a need to somehow identify this wide-mouthed, pink-tongued stranger who slaked herself upon him, slaked his own urgency again and again as her hissing breath rasped in his ears.

Once more she vanished while he slept, and he hadn't seen her all day. But at times he'd been conscious of her secret stare, a coldness falling upon him like an unglimpsed shadow, and he'd known that tonight she'd come again.

Now, as the drums sounded in the distance, Nina slept. Unmindful of the din, heedless of his presence, her eyes hooded and she lay somnolent in animal repletion.

Nolan shuddered. That's what she was; an animal. In repose, the lithe brown body was grotesquely elongated, the wide mouth accentuating the ugliness of her face. How could he have coupled with this creature? Nolan grimaced in self-disgust as he turned away.

Well, no matter — it was ended now, over once and for all. Today the message had arrived from Belem: Darlene and Robbie were on the ship, ready for the flight to Manaos. Tomorrow morning he'd start downriver to meet them, escort them here. He'd had his qualms about their coming; they'd have to face three months in this hellhole before the year was up, but Darlene had insisted.

And she was right. Nolan knew it now. At least they'd be together and that would help see him through. He wouldn't need the bottle any more, and he wouldn't need Nina.

Nolan lay back and waited for sleep to come, shutting out the sound of the drums, the sight of the shadowy shape beside him. Only a few hours until morning, he told himself. And in the morning, the nightmare would be over.

The trip to Manaos was an ordeal, but it ended in Darlene's arms. She was blonder and more beautiful than he'd remembered, more loving and tender than he'd ever known her to be, and in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

union that was their reunion Nolan found fulfillment. Of course there was none of the avid hunger of Nina's coiling caresses, none of the mindless thrashing to final frenzy. But it didn't matter; the two of them were together at last. The two of them, and Robbie.

Robbie was a revelation.

Nolan hadn't anticipated the intensity of his own reaction. But now, after the long trip back in the wheezing launch, he stood beside the crib in the spare bedroom and gazed down at his son with an overwhelming surge of pride.

"Isn't he adorable?" Darlene said. "He looks just like you."

"You're prejudiced." Nolan grinned, but he was flattered. And when the tiny pink starshell of a hand reached forth to meet his fingers, he tingled at the touch.

Then Darlene gasped.

Nolan glanced up quickly. "What's the matter?" he said.

"Nothing." Darlene was staring past him. "I thought I saw someone outside the window."

Nolan followed her gaze. "No one out there." He moved to the window, peered at the clearing beyond. "Not a soul."

Darlene passed a hand before her eyes. "I guess I'm just overtired," she said. "The long trip —"

Nolan put his arm around her. "Why don't you go lie down? Mama Dolores can look after Robbie."

Darlene hesitated. "Are you sure she knows what to do?"

"Look who's talking!" Nolan laughed. "They don't call her Mama for nothing — she's had ten kids of her own. She's in the kitchen right now, fixing Robbie's formula. I'll go get her."

So Darlene went down the hall to their bedroom for a siesta, and Mama Dolores took over Robbie's schedule while Nolan made his daily rounds in the fields.

The heat was stifling, worse than anything he could remember. Even Moises was gasping for air as he gunned the jeep over the rutted roadway, peering into the shimmering haze.

Nolan wiped his forehead. Maybe he'd been too hasty, bringing Darlene and the baby here. But a man was entitled to see his own son, and in a few months they'd be out of this miserable sweatbox forever. No sense getting uptight; everything was going to be all right.

But at dusk, when he returned to the bungalow, Mama Dolores greeted him at the door with a troubled face.

"What is it?" Nolan said. "Something wrong with Robbie?"

Mama shook her head. "He sleeps like an angel," she murmured. "But the *senora* —"

In their room, Darlene lay shivering on the bed, eyes closed. Her head moved ceaselessly on the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pillows even when Nolan pressed his palm against her brow.

"Fever." Nolan gestured to Mama Dolores, and the old woman held Darlene still while he forced the thermometer between her lips.

The red column inched upwards. "One hundred and four." Nolan straightened quickly. "Go fetch Moises. Tell him I want the launch ready, *pronto.* We'll have to get her to the doctor at Manaos."

Darlene's eyes fluttered open; she'd heard.

"No, you can't! The baby —"

"Do not trouble yourself. I will look after the little one." Mama's voice was soothing. "Now you must rest."

"No, please —"

Darlene's voice trailed off into an incoherent babbling, and she sank back. Nolan kept his hand on her forehead; the heat was like an oven. "Now just relax, darling. It's all right. I'm going with you."

And he did.

If the first trip had been an ordeal, this one was an agony: a frantic thrust through the sultry night on the steaming river, Moises sweating over the throttle as Nolan held Darlene's shuddering shoulders against the straw mattress in the stern of the vibrating launch. They made Manaos by dawn and roused Dr. Robales from slumber at his house near the plaza.

Then came the examination, the removal to the hospital, the tests and the verdict. A simple matter, Dr. Robales said, and no need for alarm. With proper treatment and rest she would recover. A week here in the hospital —

"A week?" Nolan's voice rose. "I've got to get back for the loading. I can't stay here that long!"

"There is no need for you to stay, *senor.* She shall have my personal attention, I assure you."

It was small comfort, but Nolan had no choice. And he was too tired to protest, too tired to worry. Once aboard the launch and heading back, he stretched out on the straw mattress in a sleep that was like death itself.

Nolan awakened to the sound of drums. He jerked upright with a startled cry, then realized that night had come and they were once again at anchor beside the dock. Moises grinned at him in weary triumph.

"Almost we do not make it," he said. "The motor is bad. No matter, it is good to be home again."

Nolan nodded, flexing his cramped limbs. He stepped out onto the dock, then hurried up the path across the clearing. The darkness boomed.

Home? This corner of hell, where the drums dinned and the shadows leaped and capered before flickering fires?

All but one, that is. For as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nolan moved forward, another shadow glided out from the deeper darkness beside the bungalow.

It was Nina.

Nolan blinked as he recognized her standing there and staring up at him. There was no mistaking the look on her face or its urgency, but he had no time to waste in words. Brushing past her, he hastened to the doorway and she melted back into the night.

Mama Dolores was waiting for him inside, nodding her greeting.

"Robbie — is he all right?"

"*Si, senor.* I take good care. *Por favor,* I sleep in his room."

"Good." Nolan turned and started for the hall, then hesitated as Mama Dolores frowned. "What is it?" he said.

The old woman hesitated. "You will not be offended if I speak?"

"Of course not."

Mama's voice sank to a murmur. "It concerns the one outside."

"Nina?"

"That is not her name, but no matter." Mama shook her head. "For two days she has waited there. I see you with her now when you return. And I see you with her before —"

"That's none of your business!" Nolan reddened. "Besides, it's all over now."

"Does she believe that?" Mama's gaze was grave. "You must tell her to go."

"I've tried. But the girl comes from the mountains; she doesn't speak English —"

"I know." Mama nodded. "She is one of the snake-people."

Nolan stared at her. "They worship snakes up there?"

"No, not worship."

"Then what do you mean?"

"These people — they *are* snakes."

Nolan scowled. "What is this?"

"The truth, *senor.* This one you call Nina — this girl — is not a girl. She is of the ancient race from the high peaks, where the great serpents dwell. Your workers here, even Moises, know only the jungle, but I come from the great valley beneath the mountains, and as a child I learned to fear those who lurk above. We do not go there, but sometimes the snake-people come to us. In the spring when they awaken, they shed their skins, and for a time they are fresh and clean before the scales grow again. It is then that they come, to mate with men."

She went on like that, whispering about creatures half-serpent and half-human, with bodies cold to the touch, limbs that could writhe in boneless contortion to squeeze the breath from a man and crush him like the coils of a giant constrictor. She spoke of forked tongues, of voices hissing forth from mouths yawning incredibly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wide on movable jawbones. And she might have gone on, but Nolan stopped her now; his head was throbbing with weariness.

"That's enough," he said. "I thank you for your concern."

"But you do not believe me."

"I didn't say that." Tired as he was, Nolan still remembered the basic rule — never contradict these people or make fun of their superstitions. And he couldn't afford to alienate Mama now. "I shall take precautions," he told her, gravely. "Right now I've got to rest. And I want to see Robbie."

Mama Dolores put her hand to her mouth. "I forget — the little one, he is alone —"

She turned and padded hastily down the hallway, Nolan behind her. Together they entered the nursery.

"Ah!" Mama exhaled a sigh of relief. "The *pobrecito* sleeps."

Robbie lay in his crib, a shaft of moonlight from the window bathing his tiny face. From his rosebud mouth issued a gentle snore.

Nolan smiled at the sound, then nodded at Mama. "I'm going to turn in now. You take good care of him."

"I will not leave." Mama settled herself in a rocker beside the crib. As Nolan turned to go, she called after him softly. "Remember what I have told you, *senor*. If she comes again —"

Nolan moved down the hall to his bedroom at the far end. He hadn't trusted himself to answer her. After all, she meant well; it was just that he was too damned tired to put up with any more nonsense from the old woman.

In his bedroom something rustled.

Nolan flinched, then halted as the shadow-shape glided forth from the darkened corner beside the open window.

Nina stood before him and she was stark naked. Stark naked, her arms opening in invitation.

He retreated a step. "No," he said.

She came forward, smiling.

"Go away — get out of here."

He gestured her back. Nina's smile faded and she made a sound in her throat, a little gasp of entreaty. Her hands reached out —

"Damn it, leave me alone!"

Nolan struck her on the cheek. It wasn't more than a slap, and she couldn't have been hurt. But suddenly Nina's face contorted as she launched herself at him, her fingers splayed and aiming at his eyes. This time he hit her hard — hard enough to send her reeling back.

"Out!" he said. He forced her to the open window, raising his hand threateningly as she spewed and spit her rage, then snatched her garment and clambered over the sill into the darkness beyond.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nolan stood by the window watching as Nina moved away across the clearing. For a moment she turned in a path of moonlight and looked back at him — only a moment, but long enough for Nolan to see the livid fury blazing in her eyes.

Then she was gone, gliding off into the night where the drums thudded in distant darkness.

She was gone, but the hate remained. Nolan felt its force as he stretched out upon the bed. Ought to undress, but he was too tired. The throbbing in his head was worse, pulsing to the beat of the drums. And the hate was in his head, too. God, that ugly face! Like the thing in mythology — what was it? — the Medusa. One look turned men to stone. Her locks of hair were live serpents.

But that was legend, like Mama Dolores' stories about the snake-people. Strange — did every race have its belief in such creatures? Could there be some grotesque, distorted element of truth behind all these old wive's tales?

He didn't want to think about it now; he didn't want to think of anything. Not Nina, not Darlene, not even Robbie. Darlene would be all right, Robbie was fine, and Nina was gone. That left him, alone here with the drums. Damned pounding. Had to stop, had to stop so he could sleep —

It was the silence that awakened him. He sat up with a start, realizing he must have slept for hours, because the shadows outside the window were dappled with the greyish pink of dawn.

Nolan rose, stretching, then stepped out into the hall. The shadows were darker here and everything was still.

He went down the hallway to the other bedroom. The door was ajar and he moved past it, calling softly. "Mama Dolores —"

Nolan's tongue froze to the roof of his mouth. Time itself was frozen as he stared down at the crushed and pulpy thing sprawled shapelessly beside the rocker, its sightless eyes bulging from the swollen purple face.

No use calling her name again; she'd never hear it. And Robbie —

Nolan turned in the frozen silence, his eyes searching the shadows at the far side of the room.

The crib was empty.

Then he found his voice and cried out; cried out again as he saw the open window and the gray vacancy of the clearing beyond.

Suddenly he was at the window, climbing out and dropping to the matted sward below. He ran across the clearing, through the trees and into the open space before the riverbank.

Moises was in the launch, working on the engine. He looked up as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nolan ran towards him, shouting.

"What are you doing here?"

"There is the problem of the motor. It requires attention. I come early, before the heat of the day —"

"Did you see her?"

"Who, *senor?*"

"The girl — Nina —"

"Ah, yes. The *Indio.*" Moises nodded. "She is gone, in her catamaran, up the river. Two, maybe three hours ago, just as I arrive."

"Why didn't you stop her?"

"For what reason?"

Nolan gestured quickly. "Get that engine started — we're going after her."

Moises frowned. "As I told you, there is the matter of the repairs. Perhaps this afternoon —"

"We'll never catch her then!" Nolan gripped Moises' shoulder. "Don't you understand? She's taken Robbie!"

"Calm yourself, *senor.* With my own eyes I saw her go to the boat and she was alone, I swear it. She does not have the little one."

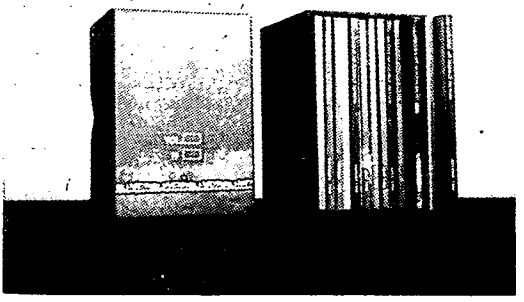
Nolan thought of the hatred in Nina's eyes, and he shuddered. "Then what did she do with him?"

Moises shook his head. "This I do not know. But I am sure she has no need of another infant."

"What are you talking about?"

"I notice her condition when she walked to the boat." Moises shrugged, but even before the words came, Nolan knew.

"Why do you look at me like that, *senor?* Is it not natural for a woman to bulge when she carries a baby in her belly?"



Handsome, Sturdy

VOLUME FILES

for Your Copies of

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Each Volume File will keep 12 copies of FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION clean, orderly, and readily accessible. Sturdily built, the files are covered with a rich black and red washable leatherette, and the lettering is in 16-carat gold leaf.

Reasonably priced at $4.25 each, 3 for $12.00 or 6 for $22.00, they are shipped fully postpaid on a money back basis if not satisfactory. Order direct from:

JESSE JONES BOX CORPORATION

Dept. F&SF P.O. Box 5120 Philadelphia, Pa., 19141

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He's a curious feature on our landscape, is Jules Verne. In his lifetime, he wrote indefatigably for the sort of market that consumes lumps of "research" in its entertainment the way boarders prize raisins in the rice dessert. The more raisins, the greater the treat. The more easily differentiated from the pasty bland mass of the narrative, the more well thought-of the bits of popularized science, of geographic arcana, of apocryphic natural history. To be a Verne fan was to take a culture; to be a "serious" person, as distinguished from the mere woolgatherers who daydreamed over the fantasies of M. Wells, whom M. Verne despised.

So popular was all this during the bulk of Verne's long career that the fact of his fame lives after him. So do a few of his stories, which are transmuted for us into movies, comic strips, children's picture books, and the like. The originals, alas, even in good translations, are seldom read; they are difficult. They are usually awkward and damned dull, is what they are. They are Michael Crichton driven back into time: Martin Caidin made less. They abound with topical references, attempts at caricature and humor, outbursts of polemic, and, always, the moment in every chapter in which all sit down while Uncle Savant addresses us.

ALGIS BUDRYS

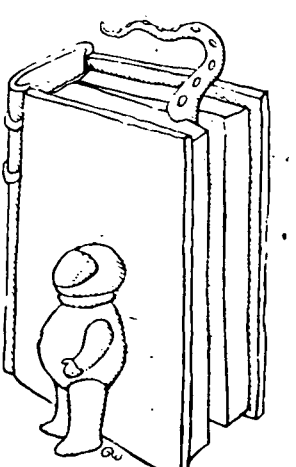
Books

Jules Verne, a Biography, by Jean Jules-Verne. Taplinger Publishing Co., New York. $10.95.

The Book of Virgil Finlay, compiled by Gerry de la Ree. Flare Books, New York, $4.95.

Lone Star Universe, Geo. W. Proctor & Steven Utley, editors. Heidelberg Publishers, Inc., Austin. $9.95.

More Women of Wonder, Pamela Sargent, ed. Vintage Books, New York. $1.95.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And they were damned hard work to write. They were created methodically, year after year, by a tireless, energetic, fascinating person whose only flaw as far as I can perceive was that he had no idea he was a hack, or that he was not a writer in the sense that Balzac or either Dumas or Hugo or even Pauline Reage or Anna Kavan were writers.

For Verne, as it is for Caidin in his spaceman stories or Crichton in his biophysics stories or his notably lumpy historical adventure pudding, there is no such thing as dialogue or narrative; there is speech and lecture. There are no descriptions; there are bills of lading. These are not people who discover and highlight the world; they are people who arrange props and spotlight them. For them there is no such thing as language; there is media. They throw down angular words like masons constructing a public convenience, and they are appreciated for it as they damned well should be.

You must understand that they probably cannot take joy in writing, because it's not writing, it's transcribing from stacks of 3x5 file cards. But it is monstrously demanding labor, and they can take great joy in having labored, or in being what they call "writers." They can be cultured, they can dine with kings, they can attend the opera. They can even, as Verne did for quite a long time, write poetry and dramatic prose. They can taste of life, living in the country and strolling, rowing down a river, buying a sailboat and learning to manage it, wandering, eventually, through all the little river mouths and tidal creeks of the French coast, and in good time progressing to larger vessels. In his pictures, Verne looks like a pleasant young man who acquired great dignity over the years, was justly mourned in his time, and is, as he should be, remembered to this day. It's simply time to realize, now, that his audience did not become a science fiction audience but the audience for *The Andromeda Strain* and *Marooned*. In fact, while he wrote a good deal of technology fiction, its amount shrinks drastically in proportion to what all else he wrote, which was mainly adventure fiction, for the Verne audience.

You're not going to find out much of this, or evidence to refute it, either, in *Jules Verne*, a biography by his grandson, Jean Jules-Verne. M. Jules-Verne, a retired jurist, has produced a lovingly detailed book which will send you immediately to other Verne biographies. There's a long family chronology here, and we may assume it's definitive. There are traces of frankness; a mention of a mistress ... but almost a certainty, a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

platonic one ... a repeated reference to the "wildness" of Verne's son (M. Jules-Verne's father) which, on the evidence presented here, was a rather half-hearted one. One suspects there was more to it, for one has noticed already that the biographer is correctly discreet in discussing family matters. One deduces, in fact, that M. Jules-Verne in later chapters is very well aware of the impression he has created, and used it to make tongue-in-cheek assertions whose import is quite the opposite of the terms in which they are couched, *compris*? The impression is often charming.

But there is a problem with M. Jules-Verne's literary judgment. Let us look at the final paragraphs of Jules-Verne's synopsis and appraisal of *Martin Paz*, an early Verne work:

> Things go wrong, however, When the Indians invade Lima, they attack the house of Don Vegal. Martin Paz is obliged to fight his own people. El Sambo contrives a conflict between his son and Certa: the latter is killed, and Martin Paz discovers in his wallet a receipt revealing that Sarah is the daughter of Don Vegal. In the meantime, the unlucky girl has been abducted by El Sambo and set loose in a canoe on the Madeira rapids. As the canoe is dashed toward the thundering waterfall, Martin Paz arrives and with a mighty fling catches the canoe with his lasso. But an arrow hits him: he falls into the canoe and the young lovers are swept over the falls to their death. A second arrow pierces the heart of Don Vegal.
>
> Despite its melodramatic ending, *Martin Paz* is quite a good novella. Verne's biographer and editor, Charles-Noel Martin, has called it a decisive development in Verne's career ... Martin makes a further point ... with which I concur entirely. This is that *Martin Paz* reveals one of Verne's major attributes as a writer: his visual approach to narrative. It seems that Verne wrote this story from a series of watercolours by the Peruvian Painter Merino ....

Right. God grant me a grandson and an editor like those two, and stifle Damon Knight. Martin and Jules-Verne go on to praise Verne for an extraordinary ability to visualize landscapes he had never seen, and transmit these visions to his readers. Those people probably thought they were seeing the real New Zealand or genuine Africa, rather than the inside of Jules Verne's head. The inside of Verne's head was an extraordinary place — where else can you confront a Peruvian landscape watercolo(u)r and see two doomed lovers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plunging over a boiling cataract? But it was probably right as well that Verne surrounded himself with the verisimilitude of the encyclopedia article, the stereopticon slide, and the postcard caption, for if he had not, someone might have thought him a fantasist, and that would never have done.

Virgil Finlay, one of SF's most respected and imitated illustrators, died at 56 after a protracted resistance against cancer. His career spanned the flowering of large-sized science fiction magazines from the 1930s onward, and persisted despite the change to digest size in the late 1940s. He died in January, 1971. His life was full of ironies.

His work receives its respectful due at the hands of Gerry de la Ree, the noted bibliophile. With love and attention, de la Ree has compiled *The Book of Virgil Finlay*, and with some deft production work the Flare division of Avon has produced an 8½"x11" $4.95 slick-finish paperback. It is all black-and-white, but that appropriate to Finlay's *metier*, which was the meticulously composed and painstakingly executed decorative interior illustration. From this book, which reproduces 120-some originals in the de la Ree collection, it's obvious that Finlay needed to work for offset reproduction on smooth paper. What he got, almost without exception, was letterpress from indifferent engravings on skewed presses onto chip-filled pulp. To think of the man sitting there, hour after hour, perfectly, faithfully, laying in a shaded area dot by dot, knowing he'd be paid perhaps a tenth of the wage per hour that he could have earned as an unskilled laborer, and that his work would be shown to the public as if rubber-stamped on paper toweling, is to picture a man as his own tormentor.

Actually, we all helped — all of us who honestly worshipped him, and praised his every appearance in *Weird Tales*, the Thrilling group, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* ... all the places where the management was happy to have him, because he attracted enthusiasm and cost no more than, say, Marchioni.

He was not, as it turns out, an illustrator on a par with any of the Wyeths, with Dean Cornwall or with Norman Rockwell, just to mention a few whose conscience was just as much their guide as his was to him. For *illustration* — for the graphic page on which appears a scene so engaging that the reader is drawn to the story, and not disappointed in the art thereafter — one goes to the demigods named above, or, in SF, to any of a dozen excellent talents. Of those practicing today, there are three or four whom our rates of payment do not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

deserve. It has always been true that there were three or four who could out-illustrate Finlay at any given time, just as it has always been true that SF always has had better artists than it deserved, balanced by an equal number of people who should have remained luncheonette sign painters.

What Finlay was, was a renderer, and a decorator. His compositions — static, intricate, mosaic — are impeccable. His normal technique — stippling on Ross board, not so he could scratch it but so that his ink would flow properly into the surface clay — brings to mind the devotion of, for example, my parish priest in Dorothy, NJ, who, in sign of faith, spent twenty years composing a long prose testament to Mary which does not once use the letter "e."

We looked at the rendering and thought this was what made the artist. In Finlay's case, it is in fact the composition, its roots buried to the trunk in Art Nouveau, with a few tendrils innocently twined toward Deco. Whatever, the man was grievously misplaced among us, and terribly unrewarded. Yet, despite our help, he brought most of it on himself. Apart from some astrology magazines, our pulps were almost his only market. He did a very little work for *Astounding* ... even less than Alex Raymond did ... and he pretty much ended his career with *Galaxy* and its sister publications of the '60s. But he never shared in the SF boom; he came too early, he went to the wrong places, and just when he might have cashed in on the nostalgia boom, he left.

His models were movie stills — you can see that right away. He blew deadlines. He set his style in the late 1930s and never changed it. He never became any better than he was in 1940. He knew a lot about his kind of art, and he knew what he loved. R.I.P.

A remarkably defensive book called *Lone Star Universe* has appeared from Texas, where George W. Proctor and Steven Utley put together this anthology of original SF by Texans. They also apparently gave Harlan Ellison carte blanche to write any damned thing he pleased for an Introduction. What you get is another chapter in Harlan's serial memoirs, interrupted only by several strong hints that he doesn't think all these stories are all that good. But yet it serves, and, with a far better than average jacket illustration by Mike Presley, the whole makes up into a rather fetching package.

The proposition is that the day of the regional anthology has arrived for SF; that is to say, that there is some particular *geist* which is uniquely Texan and in some way

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

can be found reflected within the work of Texas SF writers. I have never believed this sort of proposition even when it was advanced in aid of mundane writers, so I am not likely to endorse it in this case. More's the further, Proctor, Utley and Ellison are well aware of what the Texan *geist* is popularly supposed to be, and they go all over themselves in their attempts to neutralize the image. Only Presley literally takes it by the horns and comes off winners in that particular contest.

But the stories .... Well, Ellison has a point. There are some things in here because you are going to meet these people, or their reputations, at the next regional con, and how could you explain the omission? Still and all, we could have done without the Robert E. Howard poem, for sure.

On the other hand, there's a Lisa Tuttle, and a very interesting piece of work from T.R. Fehrenbach. Glenn L. Gilette's "Fiddle Ess" will do a lot for old *Astounding* readers. Jake Saunders' "Back to the Stone Age" is fit company for any SF short story collection. The general level of competence is on the high side, even though in many cases it is exhibited in stories which themselves are no better than they should be.

And it does change your image of Texas.

Women of Wonder, a reprint anthology of SF by female writers, appeared a few years ago and struck me as a careless, pretentious, and in some ways contrafemale assemblage. Its editor, Pamela Sargent, has now produced a physically similar work, *More Women of Wonder*, which seems to me to be everything its predecessor claimed to be. It is thoughtfully introduced by Ms. Sargent, and its selections while not always excellent are exactly representative of what has been available in the field. I can quarrel with her view of the matter, and in a moment I will, but I cannot find her confused or contradictory. This is a good book, a valuable book, and in the bargain a very nice collection of reading.

MWW begins, as usual, with a long essay written in the classic scholarly manner, with thesis footnotes and quotations from authority. This disturbs me because I have seen some of those authorities face down in the gutter beside me; in other words, I think we are too young for honest-to-goodness Gray Gurus to have developed among us. But you have to start somewhere, I suppose, and at least Sargent proceeds carefully from point to point, talking about SF as a serious thing, and about the role of females in it as creators and as characters.

Now, I disagree on the first page of the introduction that "Through

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a novel or a story, one can simulate living through experiences not normally part of one's existence." I don't think so. I think fiction awakes memories of analogous experience, and I really don't see how else it can work, unless you assume that fiction is literally magic. I think that there is real danger in forgetting that stories are *not* living; they are dramas in which plausible people react plausibly to situations in which we might react very differently if we were to step into them physically.

I don't think, in other words, that fiction teaches. I think that where fiction attempts to teach deliberately, it runs serious dangers of distorting life, and is in certain peril of not being fiction at all, but something else. "Literature has the tacit aim of improving us," Sargent goes on to say, and I say "Who says?" In "serious science fiction," Sargent continues, "in which the writer questions past values and future alternatives, science and technology exist against the background of a moral tradition."

True. *If* you select out all the SF which fits that definition, and call it "serious science fiction," then by definition serious science fiction is that which quesions, etc., and anything which does not have an overt aim at questioning past values or posing future alternatives — ie, does not have a dialectical thrust — is not "serious." And we all know that not to be serious is not to be of worth.

Sargent then quotes Kahn and Weiner, who declare that works "passionately aimed at changing the future' — such as those of Wells, Aldous Huxley and Orwell — are likely to prove more influential than more systematic and "reasonable," but correspondingly more prosaic efforts. True — if you aim at changing the future, and are a genius, it is likely the future will change. But what we do not have to buy is that this is the purpose of SF. The thought of art having a purpose of any sort beyond its own propagation is one which was invented by politicians and sociologists, not by artists.

What I mean to say is that Sargent's introduction has me dancing with rage, all the while its most infuriating aspect has apparently little to do with its main topic. I hate being caught in that posture, so I will attempt to get my feet a little farther apart. I think Sargent assigns these values to SF because it's easier to assert linearity of cause and effect when you assert them in the didactic context. If the mission is to change the real world, then where there was chauvinism there is now less chauvinism (true so far) because (ah-ha!) we have been forced to come to our right senses (maybe). Maybe so. But maybe not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

so. I think the thing that's worrisome, about any assertion that SF is now more correct than it used to be on one topic, is the possibility that we might be seen to need correction on several others. But I don't know — I may be starting at shadows. Dancing at shadows?

I keep thinking about those authorities, with their imperfect syllogisms and their plausibilities, and generations of children noting it all down on *their* file cards.

Well, look, let's get to the stories, which are "Jirel Meets Magic" by C. L. Moore and "The Lake of the Gone Forever," by Leigh Brackett, Joanna Russ's "The Second Inquisition," Josephine Saxton's "The Power of Time," Kate Wilhelm's "The Funeral," "Tin Soldier" by Joan D. Vinge, and "The Day Before the Revolution," by Ursula LeGuin. None of you are going to like them all, but this is a list of uncommon excellence.

The Moore and the Brackett are sword-janglers; the Jirel story is, as they are, inventively fantastical. Jirel of Joiry has never quite come into focus for me as a person, but she comes tantalizingly close. If she were a shade more superstitious, and a fraction less bold, she would seem more like me, I suppose — more like me if I were very brave, and Medieval, and a slim female; someone I could identify with. Of all the Jirel stories, this is the best. Of all the Brackett stories I can think of offhand, "Lake" is the one that comes closest to having a female lead. Uncharacteristically for Brackett, the male characters here are all out of focus, and the story itself is a travelogue (which Virgil Finlay decorated impressively). I can see why Sargent chose it, for a book of stories by women about women, but it is the weakest story in the book. "All the Colors of the Rainbow" might have been apter.

The Russ and the Saxton are dissimilarly pyrotechnical. The Saxton is a jazzy, clip-clop extravaganza; the Russ is the work of a superb ideator pulling one after another out of the previous, inexorably building a great piece of writing to its climax. The Wilhelm is something like it, but more conventional in its resolution — ie., it is possible to think of other stories really like it. The three form a set — two dramas around a farce — with notably strong female leads who seem thoroughly rounded young people.

"Tin Soldier" is a man-woman love story with a happy ending; conventional in those terms, leisurely in pace, well told but not omnipresently so, and yet I was so glad when the author gave me the ending I'd hoped for against hope.

The LeGuin story is the best

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LeGuin short I have ever read; the protagonist is an old woman, beyond all the events that shaped her and which she shaped, remembering her old lover without any stirring of present sexuality. They meet each other in her mind as person to person, and not as much lovers as sharing participants in something else they did together that was more important than their marriage.

In the Vinge, the woman is an interstellar flier and the man is the stay-at-home — the evocation is of the Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale — and both of them seem a little empty outside these roles. They are well-done characters, but they are characters. LeGuin's dying revolutionary is a complete human being. What story characters need to live — marked traits, immediate concerns, purposeful dialogue — are all behind her. But she is a fully realized life, so they are part of her. She-ness and he-ness are the least of it. She is, as we all ought to be at that moment, a symphony recapitulating.

Art. Art does not teach. It illuminates.*

*cf *Verne, Jules*

AN UNSOLICITED SUBMISSION

An s. f. ed's predilection
Earned contributors' malediction
He'd hang onto a story
Until it was hoary
Then reject it as "fact—not fiction."

— Deborah Crawford

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

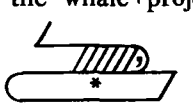
Robert Young's latest story is a gripping tale of a deep-space battle between two gargantuan organic-metallic spaceships, as depicted in this month's striking Sternbach cover.

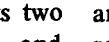
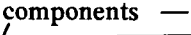
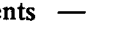
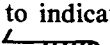
The Star Eel

by ROBERT F. YOUNG

Deep in the belly of the space-whale, Starfinder awakes. The seismiclike tremor that shook him out of sleep is not repeated, but the capsized carafe on the cabinet by his bunk testifies it was not a dream.

At first he is unable to make any sense out of the hieroglyphic message that the whale projects into his mind:



He breaks it down into its two components —  and  .  is the hieroglyph the whale used whenever it wishes to indicate itself. Obviously, then,  signifies a separate entity. An entity that has attached itself to the whale's back.

Abruptly he understands: the whale has been attacked by a star eel!

Horrified, Starfinder dons the clean captain's uniform the ward-robizer laid out for him while he slept. He buckles his Weikanzer .39 belt round his waist and checks to see whether the weapon is fully charged; then he leaves the cabin. As he pounds up the forward companionway to the bridge, he reviews the many tales he heard about star eels when he was a Jonah. All of them are unpleasant, and all of them emphasize an ineluctable fact of life — that when a star eel attaches itself to a whale and drains it of its 2-omicron-vii radiation, the whale is as dead as though a Jonah deganglioned it, and ready for the orbital shipyards on Altair IV.

The pale star-pulsing blur of Messier 31 is centered in the bridge screen. Although the whale conceivably could accomplish such a journey if it dived deep enough into the Sea of Time, it has no such intention. It merely happens to be drifting in that direction.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Starfinder turns his attention to the dorsal screens. They frame square close-ups of the eel's black underside. There is no way he can see the creaturae *in toto*. However, he does not need to see it to know what it looks like: he has seen photos of its fellows. And read about them as well. Thus he knows that this one, if it is typical of its kind, is considerably smaller than the whale and possesses sonic vision in the form of a long antennalike tail. He knows that despite the dissimilarity of size and habitat it has much in common with the lamphry of the fresh-water lakes of Earth. He knows that it's "skin" consists of a hard organic-metallic substance that is analogous but not identical to the transsteel "skin" of the whale. He knows that its underside it magnetized and allows it to cling to its host during the length of time necessary — usually about twenty hours — for it to absorb its host's "lifeblood." He knows that it reproduces by fission. He knows that its corpse can be converted into a shapeship at half the cost it would take to build a ship of similar dimensions from scratch. And although he has never seen one, he knows there are such ships in existence.

There is a chance that the eel has not fed for a long time, that its magnetic grip can be broken. It is a chance worth taking. Starfinder holds onto a nearby stanchion and braces himself. "*Roll, whale,*" he says. "*Break free!*"

The whale rolls. Mightily. It is as though a cosmic storm rages in the Sea of Space. As though the star-flecked immensities are alternating between troughs and waves. Gradually the storm abates, and presently the double hieroglyph reappears in Starfinder's mind —

The whale has failed.

Starfinder ponders the problem. It will do no good for the whale to dive — it will only take the star eel into the past with it. And after the eel absorbs the last of the whale's 2-omicron-vii radiation, it will die; whereupon Time, intolerant of paradoxes, will regurgitate it back to the present, the eel with it.

There simply is no way that the whale can dislodge this antagonistic symbiont that took it unawares. Unless Starfinder can accomplish the task, it is doomed.

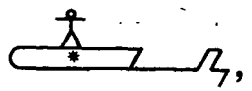
Unfortunately there is a limit to his lore, and he does not know whether the star eel has a ganglion. But even if it does have, he has no way of getting to it. The beam his Weikanzer .39 discharges is of near-laser intensity, but it is incapable of burning through the eel's thick organic-metallic "skin." Probably the creature's tail is its most vulnerable part; but even if he can

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

somehow sever it — perhaps by ramming it with the lifeboat — there is no guarantee that the eel's resultant blindness will cause it to release its prey.

There simply is no clear-cut course for him to follow. He will have to play it by ear. Leaving the bridge, he descends to Deck 3 and proceeds to the boat bay. There he climbs into one of the lifeboats, activates the locks and sails out into the Sea of Space.

When the whale and Starfinder made their convenant, the whale "said,"



indicating that (Starfinder) would be its master and that it would take him anywhere or when he wished to go in (space) and (time). Starfinder carried out his part of the pact by repairing the whale's unique second ganglion whose presence the Jonah who had destroyed the first hadn't suspected. Then the whale deorbited from the shipyards of Altair IV, and whale and man dived into the Sea of Time, that aspect of the continuum that is at once part of and at once discrete from the Sea of Space: the interreality that holds conventional reality together. Now whale and man have returned to the present — to one of the infinitudinous surfaces of the Sea of Space.

On Starfinder's right blazes the cold white bonfire of *a* Andromedae; "above" it, and countless parsecs beyond, the roseate antimacassar of M-31 glows softly.

He retro-fires before the boat breaks free from the gravitic pull of the whale-ship, then fires a gentle burst from the starboard jet and brings the craft around. Before him, ship and symbion are silhouetted massively against a vast scattering of stars. The hieroglyph is misleading. It corresponds to the whale's self-image — to the way it sees itself. In actuality, the whale is not nearly so streamlined, not nearly so much like a spaceship. But its hull is burnished like a spaceship's, and its tiers of portholes glow like golden eyes.

Below them, along the star eel's nearer flank, glow similar tiers of "eyes."

Stunned, Starfinder stares.

The combined mass of the two gargantuan bodies pulls the boat inward. He employs just enough ventral thrust to put him on a plane with the eel. Gradually its "eyes" resolve into portholes like the whale's. Its nearer flank, which should be meteor-pocked and creviced, is burnished like the whale's. There is only one possible answer: the eel is an organic-metallic ship too.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But how can it be if it is still alive?

Granted, the whale is alive and it is a ship — or almost one. But it is like no other whale-ship in existence. Its fellow ships are all as dead as it itself would be if it hadn't possessed a second ganglion and if Starfinder hadn't repaired it.

There is a searchbeam in the lifeboat's prow. Starfinder turns it on and plays its dazzling light over the star eel's flank. In seconds he spots the telltale seam of a boat-bay lock. Just aft of it is a large porthole. A face is discernible beyond its thick, unbreakable glass. A thin face, with large round eyes —

The face of a frightened girl.

"I still don't think I should have let you in. If I'd known you weren't really dying like you let on, I wouldn't have."

The star eel's boat bay is smaller than the whale's. It contains two lifeboats similar to his own. The girl is wearing an abbreviated khaki dress and thick-soled canvas sandals. Her light-brown hair is bobbed and banged; her blue eyes remind him of a wildflower that grows in the idyllic hills south of Swerz, the capital city of Altair IV. The barest beginning of breasts lends her dress its only contour. He judges her to be about twelve.

It is clear she is all alone. Were she not, someone in authority would have shown up by this time. Fortunately, Anglo-American is numbered among the languages he is on familiar terms with. "I take it you're both the captain and the crew," he says.

She gives a nervous little nod. "And the only passenger."

"You're like me then."

"I thought Pasha's host was just a whale — till I saw you. I didn't know it was a ship too."

"Would it have made any difference if you had?"

"You mean, would I have stopped Pasha from attacking it? No. I told Pasha he could make his own decisions in such matters."

"Pasha being the star eel?"

"My star eel. They enslaved him, and I set him free."

"I thought star eels were killed before they were converted into ships."

"They are. But Pasha was an exception. The converters referred to him as a 'noble experiment.' But I don't think enslaving someone is noble, do you?"

"When you freed him, why did you go with him?"

"I wanted to be free too."

He gazes into her earnest blue eyes, seeking some vestige of dissimulation and finding not a trace. "You were enslaved too?" he asks.

She nods. "My father is a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

converter in the *a* Andromedae IX orbital shipyards. Their union is so rich and powerful that it controls the whole planet. Its members call themselves proletariats, but actually they're the *haute bourgeoisie*. They decide what should be taught in school and what shouldn't be. Which books should be read and which shouldn't be. Which music should be played and which shouldn't be. They have square brains and tin eardrums and carry ships of ignorance in their back pockets."

"Are you saying that the schoolchildren of *a* Andromedae IX are *slaves*?"

"It amounts to that, doesn't it?"

He sighs. "I suppose so." Then, "What's your name?"

"Ciel Bleu. Ciely. I know why you wanted to come on board. You want me to call Pasha off. Well, I won't!"

Easy does it, he cautions himself. Aloud, he says, "I missed breakfast this morning. Do you think you might spare a fellow spacetraveler a cup of coffee?"

"It's afternoon my time. But I can spare you one. What's *your* name?"

"Starfinder," Starfinder says.

The star eel's galley is small and compact. It has two magnet-lock doors, one opening into a well-stocked larder, the other into a large formal dining hall. The eel-ship was meant to carry passengers, perhaps as many as a thousand. At the moment it carries exactly two.

Seated across from Ciely at the tiny galley table, Starfinder says, "Pasha means a lot to you, doesn't he?"

Solemnly, "Pasha is my life."

"The whale is *my* life."

"Don't you have a name for him?"

"No."

"You should think one up."

"Why, if he's going to die?"

A silence. Then, "I — I forgot."

Starfinder sips his coffee. "What happens to me when he does, Ciely?"

"Don't worry about that. Pasha and I will set you down on the nearest inhabited planet. Do you always go around dressed up to beat the band, Starfinder?"

She is referring to his white captain's uniform with its gaudy golden epaulettes and its seven tiers of ornamental ribbons. "Most of the time. It's my way of setting an example for myself."

"What's that scar on your cheek?"

"It's from a two-oh-seven radiation burn. A whale that wasn't quite dead gave it to me when I first went to space. I was blind for two years. That's why I became a Jonah."

"To get even."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes. I deganglioned thirty-two of them. Blew up their brains. I got even."

"If you hate them so much, why should you care what happens to this one?"

"I don't hate them any more. When I looked at the thirty-second one, I saw a face in it — you know, the way people on Earth see a face in the moon. The face I saw was mine."

"And then you quit killing them."

Starfinder nods. "I got a job as a converter in the orbital shipyards of Altair IV. I discovered that this whale was still alive and that it could communicate. It had two ganglia before it was Jonahed, only one of which had been destroyed. I told it I would repair the other if it would enter into bondage. It agreed."

"That was cruel."

Starfinder shrugs. "Maybe. But I was a slave like you, sort of. And the whale meant freedom. More than that, it provided a means of visiting the past. A live whale is a time machine, Ciely. Call Pasha off and we'll climb aboard and pay a visit to King Arthur's Court. We'll drop in on Tolstoy at *Yasnaya Polyana*. We'll watch Armstrong take his first small step on the moon."

Sadly, Ciely shakes her head. "I can't, Starfinder. This is the first time he's fed since I set him free. It may be ages before he finds another host. He may never find one."

Undaunted, Starfinder marshals his forces and moves to a point opposite the enemy's left flank. "I can understand why you're so fond of him," he says slyly. "He's a most remarkable ship. What I don't understand is how he could have been converted without first having been deganglioned."

"I can see you don't know beans about star eels," Ciely says with comic exasperation. "How could they be deganglioned when they don't have ganglia? Ordinarily all the eelers do when their raise one is hem it in till it starves to death and then tow it into the yards. Pasha's case was different. The converters ordered a live eel so they could conduct their 'noble experiment,' and the eelers captured him with grapnels and towed him in alive. The converters burned their way inside him, got to his psychomotor nucleus, which is analogous to but by no means the same thing as a whale's ganglion, and attached 'extensors' to the major motor centers. The extensors were then run back to a control panel that had been installed in the meantime, and hooked up to a series of switches. Then anybody standing at the console could make Pasha do anything they wanted him to just by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

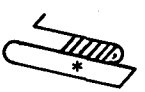
pressing the right buttons. After I stole him and we became fast friends, I pulled all the extensors out of the switch boxes. I just couldn't stand having him enslaved like that. Now he does anything I tell him to."

"But doesn't that amount to the same thing?"

"Of course it doesn't! Because now if he wants to disobey, he can. And I didn't bind him to any agreement either, the way you did with your whale!"

Starfinder grins. "Touche!"

Suddenly an anguished projection appears in his mind —



The figure's inclination from the horizontal is the whale's way of saying that it is weakening fast. However, Starfinder is not alarmed. Thanks to Ciely, he now knows how the star eel can be dislodged.

He can tell from the look of wonderment on her face that the double hieroglyph registered in her mind too. "*Deactivate all nonessential systems, whale,* He says-projects, more for her benefit than for the whale's, "*and lower interior temperature to five degrees Celsius.*" Then, so the whale will not think he intends to abandon it, he adds, "*Maintain regular atmosphere and standard one-G.*"

The look of wonderment lingers on Ciely's face after the projection fades. "Is that his way of talking to you, Starfinder?" she asks.

"Yes. How does Pasha talk to you?"

"He doesn't. He just does whatever I tell him to."

"Then tell him, please, to release the whale."

"No."

"Then I must *make* him release it, Ceily."

"You can't. He won't obey anyone but me."

Starfinder stands up. "But I can, Ciely. I know how now."

The blue eyes widen as she grasps the connotation of "now." Then, quickly, she puts her hand over her mouth as though to prevent words already spoken from getting out. He has already ascertained that the larder is a cul-de-sac. Swiftly he steps over to the door to the dining hall, lets himself out and closes and locks it behind him. His parting glimpse of Ciely shows her still sitting at the table with her hand over her mouth. He finds it odd that she should be so slow to react. She did not strike him as a dim-witted girl. Quite the contrary, he was struck by her intelligence.

In Starfinder's day, the men and women who choose ship-building as a trade are not renowned for their creativity. In the back of each

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of their minds there apparently is a universal blueprint showing how a spaceship, whether it is to be converted from a whale or an eel, or built from scratch, should be laid out. Thus, for Starfinder to find the control room of the eel is a relatively simple matter.

The console is an imposing affair, its banks of buttons, gauges, dials and meters extending all the way to the ceiling. Moreover, it is built into the forward bulkhead. But Starfinder is not dismayed, either by its seeming complexity or by its seeming inaccessibility from the rear. In all probability only a small fraction of the dazzling array is related to the extensors, and no console has ever been built without its builders providing a means for a repairman to get at it from behind.

Presently his practiced eye singles out a panel whose meters have blank faces and whose dials look like dummies. Its base is flush with the deck and there is a telltale scratch on its upper right-hand corner. In seconds he finds the camouflaged catch, and a moment later pulls the panel out and sets it to one side. Then he crawls through the square aperture and stands up. He is in a cubby hole hacked out of the fibrous interior-tissue of the eel and illuminated only by the eel's inner phosphorescence.

The phosphorescence is paler than that which emanates from the transseteel-like internal tissue of the whale, but it is bright enough for him to discern the extensors. There are five of them, and they emerge from an opening at the base of the bulkhead and lie sinuously on the deck. Insofar as he can see, they are perfectly ordinary split-end impulse-cables. One is blue, one yellow, one green, one red, and one black. The switch boxes they were pulled from are of corresponding colors.

Plugging Pasha back in should be a cinch.

Impulse-cables employ the molecular relay principle and are nonconductive, and so there is no real reason to suppose the extensors are hot. Bending down, he touches the red one tentatively. Not so much as a tingle. Boldly he picks it up. It is about one inch in diameter, surprisingly flexible, surprisingly warm and surprisingly smooth. So smooth, in fact, that it slips out of his fingers and drops back to the deck.

He picks it up again. It seems to writhe in his hand. He is about to drop it of his own accord when suddenly it coils itself tightly around his right wrist.

He essays the impossible task of drawing his Weikanzer .39 with his left hand. Before he even manages to touch the holster, another extensor — the green one — coils itself

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

around his left wrist.

The blue one coils itself around his right ankle.

The yellow one around his left.

He knows now why Ciely put her hand over her mouth. It wasn't to hold back words that had already got out; it was to stifle her laughter.

When she pulled the extensors out, the eel, to ensure that it would never be enslaved again, somehow transformed them into prosthetic tentacles with which to defend itself. Starfinder knows this now. He should have guessed it before.

And Ciely knew it all along. Perhaps she found out by accident, or perhaps she deduced it. Either way, she knew — knows — and knowing, permitted Starfinder to set forth for Samarra without a word of warning.

No doubt she also knew — knows — any member of ways to get out of the galley without using the dining-room door. If she doesn't, she can probably get Pasha to open it for her.

She may even have informed him of Starfinder's intent. "Get him!" she probably said. "He's a typical no-good member of the *haute bourgeoisie*!"

One should never underestimate either the intelligence or the capacity for cruelty of innocent children.

The eel's black tentacle feels its way up Starfinder's right leg, up his abdomen, up his sternum, and coils itself around his neck.

This is not the first time he has been to Samarra. On his previous visits he has always been able to elude Death at the last minute by dodging down a dark alley or by blending with the crowd in the market place. But this time there is no dark alley available and the market place is empty.

The black tentacle coils itself more tightly around his neck. Redness gathers along the edges of his vision, moves inward like a curtain closing at the end of a play. The name of the play is *Starfinder and the Star Eel*; the roaring in his ears is the sound of applause. Now the house lights start going out, one by one. The audience departs till only one playgoer remains — a girl with bobbed banged hair and eyes the hue of a flower that grows in the idyllic hills south of Swerz. She is sitting white-faced in the front row, just beyond the dimming footlights.

"Let him go, Pasha. Let him go!"

The prosthetic tentacles relax, fall away. Starfinder sags to his knees. He feels warm fingers massaging his throat, a faint softness against his cheek. Something warm and wet and exceedingly small drops upon his forehead. He hears a distant voice: "Starfinder, Star-

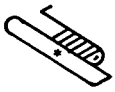
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

finder, I didn't mean for him to hurt you. Oh, Starfinder, I'm so glad you're all right!"

They sit down in the pale phosphorescence with their backs against the hacked-out bulkhead. "You could have warned me," Starfinder whispers. "You had time before I closed the door."

"I thought it was funny, your thinking you could plug Pasha back in. There's a hidden trap door in the larder; so I knew I could get out. I wanted to teach you a lesson. I never dreamed you'd find the console so soon."

The anguished double hieroglyph that appeared in their minds before appears again, this time at a more acute angle —



Yes, whale — I know.

The look of wonderment has returned to Ciely's face. "What is the star for, Starfinder?"

"It represents his ganglion."

"Oh."

"The place where he dreams his dreams and thinks his thoughts. Whatever they may be. The most remarkable thing about him, Ceily, isn't his size, or even his ability to dive into the past, as you might think. It's his intelligence and sensitivity. He's ten times smarter than I am, and sometimes I think he's far more civilized."

"I caught a glimpse of him just before Pasha attached himself to his back. I — I almost wished Pasha hadn't. He seemed beautiful, in a way."

"He is beautiful, Ciely."

"Is he beautiful inside?"

"Very beautiful. Would you like to see?"

"... All right."

It is cold in the belly of the whale. They can see their breaths. The phosphorescence emanating from the bulkheads has paled to a pearly glow.

Hiding his impatience, Starfinder takes the girl on an official tour. It is time-consuming and seemingly malapropos, but it is the only way he knows to save the whale. He shows her the elegant dining hall, the immaculate galley, the speckless staterooms. He escorts her past the empty echoing holds. Together they look in upon the blooming hydroponic gardens, gaze through the cobalt lens of the duodenal window, which Starfinder himself installed, into the fiery maw where ordinary matter is transformed into 2-omicron-vii. They linger for a while in the well-appointed lounge while Ceily drinks a can of cherry soda. They look in upon the storeroom where enough provisions are piled to last either of them half a lifetime. They

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

descend to the lowest deck and inspect the whale's drive tissue. They visit the grav. generator compartment, the recycling station and the atmosphere-control room. Finally they ascend the forward companionway to the bridge where M-31 still glows in the screen like a roseate antimacassar on the black headrest of the star-encrusted throne of God.

"Yes," Ciely murmurs, "it is a beautiful ship indeed."

"Whale."

"Yes. Whale. Do you know," she says, "I sometimes make that same mistake with Pasha. I start thinking of him as a ship. And it makes me ashamed, because he's as much of a living being as I am."

"Sometimes I think of the whale that way too," Starfinder says.

"And do you feel ashamed?"

"Yes."

"It comes as quite a surprise to me that a member of the *haute bourgeoisie* should have such refined sensibilities."

"I'm not a member any more."

"Perhaps that explains it." She looks at him beseechingly. "If I call Pasha off, will you guarantee that the whale won't hurt him?"

"I'm positive he won't, Ceily."

She faces the bridge screen, gazes out across the immensities at the pale pink antimacassar of M-31. She seems so small, standing there; so thin, so fragile. So terribly alone. She whispers the command that she projects into the star eel's nucleus, and the whispered words dissolve the silence that shrouds the bridge —

"Release him, Pasha. And wait for me."

The silence resolidifies. It is like the black silence that shrouds the whale and its piggy-back rider. Girl and man are immobile. The bridge screen is a black-canvas upon which a cosmic artist has painted an island universe.

Presently a tremor passes through the whale. It is similar to the one that shook Starfinder out of sleep, but not as violent. After it passes, a great dark shape hurtles into view on the bridge screen, occulting M-31. The star eel has leaped free from its prey and has hurried on ahead to await its mistress.

A crepitant roar fills the belly of the whale. Starfinder has heard the sound before. It is the roar of 2-omicron-vii surging into the whale's drive tissue: the prelude to a tremendous burst of speed. *"No, whale — NO!"* he screams.

The whale does not "hear." Primitive rage seethes in its ganglion, flows through its bulkheads and its decks. It is no longer a ship nor even a whale; it is a space beast born of the far-flung fury of the primordial explosion; the haecceity

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of vindictiveness. Transmuting the last of its energy into savage thrust, it hurls itself toward its hereditary enemy.

The eel has turned broadside. Desperately it tries to get out of the path of the great black beast it presumed to prey upon. But the whale's momentum triples in the space of seconds. Pasha's nearer flank looms large in the bridge screen; larger still. Abruptly there is a hideous shriek of metallic tissue being ripped asunder; a vast virtiginous shuddering. Starfinder encircles a stanchion with one arm, Ceily with the other, as before their eyes Pasha breaks in two. Two-omicron-vii radiation escapes into space, turning the screen blue; there is a white, a blinding light. Ceily screams. The white light flashes in the bridge portholes as the disintegrating halves of Pasha flicker past. The aft-scope briefly frames a flaming mass.

The whale discerns a distant meteor swarm. It homes in on it and begins to feed.

Ciely's eyes have not moved from the bridge screen. It is dappled with distant stars now — spatters from the cosmic artist's brush. "Pasha," she whispers. "My Pasha."

At last she turns away. She frees herself from Starfinder's encircling arm and looks uncomprehendingly up at his face. "You said — You said —"

"I never dreamed he's react like that, Ciely. He — he had begun to seem human to me. I forgot that humanity, at best, is a surface characteristic."

She begns to cry. Her shoulders do not shake, her body does not convulse; that is the most terrible part about it. She stands there immobile, tears flowing without end, as though her grief is a fountain that will never go dry. "Pasha was all I had."

A phase of her life has come to an abrupt close. She cannot pass unscathed into the next unless the precise psychological note is sounded. Starfinder knows this, but he is tone-deaf and has no notion of what the note should be. He says nothing.

"All I had."

Still Starfinder says nothing. He is a clothing-store dummy. He is a wooden Indian standing outside a tobacco store.

The whale has finished feeding. It rescinds the energy restrictions imposed by the man. Warmth creeps onto the bridge. There is a distant rumble as the recycling system comes back to life.

A silence ensues. A long one. At length a rebus takes shape in Starfinder's mind. In Ciely's —

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Clearly the whale is contrite. It is trying to butter up to the man. Starfinder shakes his head. *"It won't work, whale."*

A second rebus appears:

Ciely is gazing at Starfinder. Miraculously, the flow of tears has ceased. "What does it mean, Starfinder?"

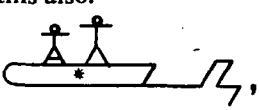
"It means that you're his 'friend.' He's trying to say he's sorry, Ceily."

A third:

Starfinder translates again. "It means that both of us are his 'friends.' That he and you and I are three comrades."

The look of wonderment is back on Ceily's face. It does not eclipse the grief that resides in her blue-flower eyes, but it is a beginning. Someday she must be returned to *a* Andromedae IX and her *haute bourgeoisie* parents. But not yet. Not for a long while. She needs the therapy that only the whale can provide.

The whale, which seems to know everything else, apparently knows this also.



it "says," and the three comrades sail forth into the Sea of (space) and (time).

"... and baby makes three, in our blue heaven ...."

Coming next month — special Harlan Ellison issue

- **THREE new stories by Harlan Ellison:**
  "Alive and Well and On A Friendless Voyage"
  "Working With the Little People"
  "Jeffty Is Five"
- **"Harlan," a profile by Robert Silverberg**
- **"Harlan Ellison, The Healing Art of Razorblade Fiction," an article by Richard Delap**
- **An Ellison Bibliography by Leslie Swigart**
- **Special cover by Kelly Freas**

The July issue is on sale May 31. Or use the coupon on page 110.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Spring for an F&SF T-Shirt

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

P.O. Box 56, Cornwall, Ct. 06753

Send me _____ F&SF shirts at $4.50 each, enclosed.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ **Zip** _____

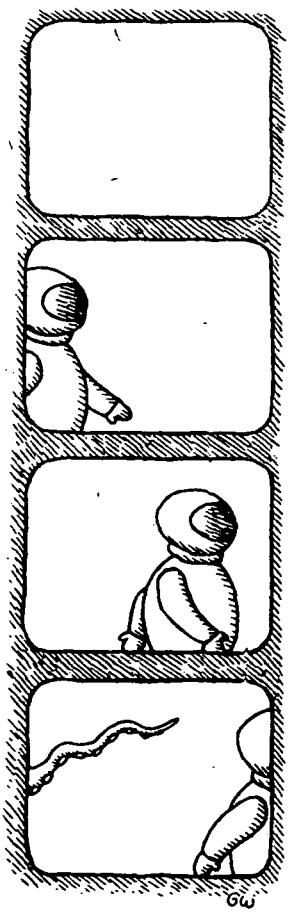
Small ☐ Medium ☐ Large ☐ Extra Large ☐

Order size larger to allow for shrinkage.
Add $1.00 for Canadian and foreign postage.

F&SF T-shirts make a great gift and are available only from this magazine at the bargain price of $4.50 each, which includes postage and handling. These handsome 100% cotton shirts come in navy blue with the original F&SF logo imprinted in white. All sizes in stock and shipped as soon as we receive the coupon or a separate order.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BAIRD SEARLES
Films



JOLLY JUVENALIA
ON THE LITTLE SCREEN

The relationship between the comics and science fiction is a strong, but uneasy one, and I'm not about to go into the ramifications of it here. But I fall in the middle at least, since in the war years of the '40s, the comics fed whatever craving there was for the glamorous (in the medieval sense) until I discovered the glorious pulps and *their* glamor.

My favorites were, aside from something called *Bombazine and His Swamp Friends* (in which a minor character named Pogo was just being introduced), Captain Marvel and Wonder Woman. They, their villains, and their adventures were really fantastic, as opposed to Superman, for instance, who despite his origins spent a lot of time chasing very plebian crooks and spies.

A while back I noted an abortive attempt to bring Wonder Woman to television with one Cathy Lee Crosby had been a disaster, and a second attempt, laid in the '40s and with a strong comic book style had been a delight. (Who can ever forget Cloris Leachman as the Queen of the Amazons?)

I'm glad to report that the series developed from this is just as much fun, and just as well produced. And

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the question arises as to why *this*, which at face value is as inane and silly as you might expect, works, where *Space 1999*, for instance, which is equally inane and silly, doesn't?

Probably the best reason is that *Wonder Woman*, by its very nature, doesn't take itself at all seriously. And therefore, by a curious paradox, becomes much easier to *take* seriously, on its own level.

A recent episode, a two-parter, was quite respectable s/f in its concept and plotting. An alien emissary from a united council of worlds comes to Earth to make a final judgement as to its potential for good (which means eventual acceptance) or ill (destruction). He is, of course, made off with by the naughty Nazis and saved by WW. It was all nicely done, particularly the wrangling in the council of aliens.

Other positive points are the straight-from-the-comics titles that pop up every once in a while, and the impeccable period atmosphere, though Steve Trevor's pompadour is not so formidably '40s as it was in the pilot.

And a special word for Lyle Waggoner as Steve, and especially Lynda Carter as WW. *TV Guide*, in an article on the series, put her down a bit, which I think grossly unfair. It's terribly hard to play a comic strip person, and I'm not being facetious. Keeping that blank naievete without coming across as stupid and boring is very difficult, and Carter manages it beautifully. She is properly mousy as Diana Prince, and romping about as Wonder Woman, she will at times throw out a delightful little grin, as if to say, "*I* know this is silly, and *you* know it's silly. But isn't it fun?"

Beside, she fills those golden breast cups without looking grotesque, which is no small feat (take a look at some '40s s/f pulp covers, and you'll see what I mean).

A show called *Fantastic Journey*, which made its entry into this year's second season, more or less qualifies in the same category. I've only seen the initial program in the series at this writing: It's in prime time, which is a bit of a surprise; it would probably sweep the ratings on Saturday morning.

The premise is that this group of scientists is on this fishing boat, see. (*Why* they are on this fishing boat may have been explained in a fast aside, but I missed it.) For audience identification purposes they are a mixed lot: two women (one young and hysterical, one older and calm), one black, one Oriental, one pre-pubic boy, and a bunch of white, adult males I had trouble in telling apart.

They head into the Bermuda

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Triangle (a bad start, but the mass audience has to be given some rationale [sic] for what happens) and are enveloped by a lime green cloud with much ringing of ship's bells.

They come to on land, which is chock full of giraffes and koalas and leopards and lions and tigers and bears; not to mention Elizabethan pirates, a man from the 23rd century disguised as an Arawak Indian with a ship with a lucite juice dispenser, and androids serving a brain that looks like chocolate pudding gone wrong and is known as the Source who lives in a glass building and ...

Continued next week ...

Now all this is pure comic strip s/f (the above anomalisms are explained by the fact that this land is filled with time locks — which will do until a better explanation comes along) and again there is the impression that no one is taking any of this too seriously. The effects are not bad, the action moves right along, and while I know this is the kind of thing that "gives science fiction a bad name" (especially in prime time), tough. That's like *Laverne and Shirley* giving comedy a bad name with people who don't know Noel Coward; that's their hard luck.

So I'll probably check in every week to see how the motley crowd is making out in Time Lock Country, just for fun. That's a good enough reason for me.

Arthur C. Clarke, of all people, turned up on every one of Ma Bell's commercials during the 2-hour run of *The Man in the Iron Mask*. And came off very well, I must say. He projected the image of the slightly retiring man-of-letters-and-science nicely. That's not all that far from his own persona, of course, but to even project *yourself* smoothly on TV is not easy, without coming across as moronically as those housewives whose glasses have spots.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Robert Thurston's last story for F&SF was "Aliens," December 1976, a provocative tale that pleased some readers and disturbed others. A similar response is likely for this new story, which, despite the title, takes place at a party and does not fall easily into any category.

The Mars Ship

by ROBERT THURSTON

The first day after being thawed, I phoned Bill and Lise. Lise seemed to back away from her screen when she realized it was me calling. City pay phones were never adjusted, and so her image was too much out of focus for me to be sure what she did, but as we talked I sensed her boredom with seeing good old me again.

Perhaps I deserved such a response. During my last go-around, I'd avoided Bill and Lise. I followed Bill's career — watched him develop that basic-hero role from a charismatic lead in a TV soap to a long run in Broadway's most determinedly old-fashioned musical, to a featured part in the first movie ever shot partly on the moon. But I never wanted to see him and acknowledge his success. My own failure, enshrined in my sparsely published writings, made me a misanthrope unable to accept the success of any other rival in any other art. However, circumstances now had altered. Bill was back on the soap, *Till Forever Comes*, and my overpowering jealousy could be reduced to mere spiteful envy.

A few hours earlier, while crouching in my hotel room, I had turned on TV, always for me the best way of putting off venture into the outside world. Pleasantly surprised that TV had finally gone holo (although the picture on my set did not always maintain the three dimensions, and people were usually fuzzy around the edges, as if troubled by some sort of dissolving disease), I switched from channel to channel until I was caught off-guard by the sudden appearance of Bill, leaning toward me, pointing a threatening finger. I recognized him right away, even though he was a bit heavier, a shade less charismatic around his eyes. The rakish lawyer he played on the program had matured to a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sententious judge. At the moment I tuned in, he lectured his weeping daughter about her lapses in employing birth control procedures.

Looking at a mirror (which replaced the drabness of the hotel room with a palm-treed Hawaiian background) and back at Bill's image and back at myself in the mirror, I very much felt my age — forty — and realized why it had been considered such an obstacle over half a century ago when I was a youngster. Neither Bill nor I really looked forty, at least the forty that I'd been prepared for, but there were hints of middle age about us. For him, in the resigned authority of his voice. For me, the after-thaw fear in my eyes. Thawing was, after all, supposed to bring feelings of joy and renewal.

Hell, as far as our "objective" ages went, we were both closer to eighty and should be grateful that we had reached this point in time so vigorously.

The boredom in Lise's voice, together with the suggestion of sleepiness in her unfocused face, almost made me hang up on her in the middle of her monologue. Post-cryogenic monologues really pissed me off anyway. People seemed compelled to automatically summarize as soon as you contacted them. When they were not dutifully filling you in on themselves, they had to catch you up on everything else. "Have you seen the new monorail yet? Goes all the way around town; a great trip, I hear, though I haven't tried it yet; took simply years to build; stopped at least three times by, you know, politics and things; some people say that it'll rid us of cars altogether, though you realize of course that cars are no longer the polluting dangers they used to be, at least not *as much* .... Did you know there's a big revival on for Georgette Heyer's stuff? Most of them have been adapted for flicks and the tube; say, I bet you'd be interested in *that* — being a writer and all — that feelies were finally tried a couple of years ago and flopped, everything out of sync and dealing so exclusively with sex and melodrama that nobody cared, but they say they're going to try again, though I think their mistake was assuming that people *wanted* to experience that much sensation; I certainly don't care for being wired into somebody else's feelings .... Have you seen the Mars Ship? Best sight in town for some, though I think it's a bit tasteless of course, a bit too vulgarly done, you know, but terrifically effective, I guess; well, we have to put up with it anyway, our neighborhood and all."

Lise carried on so long about current events and the bio of herself and Bill that I missed her first invitation to the party. I think she

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

saw that I had clicked off — she always was adept at social nuance, and probably the resolution of her picture was better, anyway — and she changed her tone of voice for the second invite to make sure I would listen.

"A party, dear, tonight. Best thing for you. A lot of people coming, but I'm sure I can squeeze you in."

I did not want to go at first. I feared mingling with people so soon after thaw.

"Thanks a lot, Lise, but —"

"Carolyn will be here."

She knew that tidbit would make me helpless. Focus or no focus, her superiority was clear. I quickly agreed to attend her get-together and hung up. Long after Lise's image had faded, I still stared at the screen.

The mention of Carolyn had disrupted both my objective and subjective senses of time. We had gone to high school and college together. We had honor-societied and senior-prommed (but not, of course, with each other); we had demonstrated and sign-carried and performed in plays together, had traveled with the same friends (a crowd which had included Bill and Lise) to the same hangouts. For seven or eight years I worked at being her shadow. Which was perhaps my mistake. Instead of becoming *her* shadow, I merely became *a* shadow — a stick figure on the wall behind her. So many times I almost made a pass, almost grabbed her, almost shouted out my feelings, almost touched her indecently. But I always failed.

Why she was so formidable, I don't know. Expecially in those days, when morality was a joke in our crowd. The Sexual Revolution! God, in that I was the worst reactionary possible, and I thought that Carolyn was like me. I treated her as if she belonged to some other era — Prom Queen of the fifties or gentle, prim Victorian maiden or dedicated peasant girl who listened to saints. It was difficult to think of her otherwise, because she carried herself so stiffly, maintained such a proper decorum. She put down rude or obscene behavior with awesome efficiency.

I stood at the bottom of her pedestal — you could not see her, it was so high — and searched for an even whiter white to paint it with. One of the least favorite moments of my life was learing that she had given up school to run off with this jock she'd been living with. This jock, who in cafeteria booths had bragged to me of his high number of scores with women. This jock, who'd become acquainted with Carolyn by attaching himself to me.

I had never seen her again after her flight. Among friends her name came up from time to time, but I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

absorbed no information about her. It seemed forever since I'd seen her last — sitting on a couch, curved and pointed eyeglasses, lightly tinted, shading eyes that looked sadly off, through a window in a wall that had no windows.

How many times had I gone through the cryogenic process since I had last heard her name? Starting more than forty years ago, when I was twenty-nine, I had been frozen and thawed five times. On each coming-out I found that the process had been improved and I would face no danger another time through. Another time through. How attractive, how necessary that next time through always seemed. I could only stay out in the world two or three years at a time. They nearly refused my last application on the grounds that I overused the privilege. These days many people were overusing the privilege. So, over those forty-plus years, I had been conscious of only about eleven years passing. I had last heard of Carolyn during my second, or no later than the early part of my third, reincarnation. Just hearing it now, so much time later, made me want to see her again immediately.

I arrived at Bill and Lise's neighborhood early, having walked through streets with my eyes to the ground, avoiding notice of changes. I rejected the use of one of the free cars parked along the way. Free car privilege was one of the few changes they considered important enough to tell me about when I was thawed. Their new idea was to let you find your own way. "We'd like for you to stick it out a bit longer this go-around," the painted young attendant had told me. Well I didn't care about free cars, nor did I want to see the cleaner and faster rapid transit system, which I knew would still have dank odors and strategically placed graffiti.

I took refuge in a little center-mall park because it appeared to be empty. Passing an immaculately clean bench in the old green-slatted style, I crossed into the park proper, where I was surprised by a warm breeze. Another slant new to me: apparently the wind came out of tiny webwork vents in the sides of the seemingly decorative posts set at intervals along the borders of the park. The posts seemed responsible for another effect. Once in the park, you could not see anything of the buildings (or, for that matter, cars and people) that surrounded it. In a city's center mall separating directions of traffic, you could step into more-or-less country surroundings.

My ears strained to hear some of the din from which I'd just escaped. The quiet reminded me of the small city in which Carolyn and I had grown up. I'd not returned

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there for years but suspected that it had finally attached itself to the large city which, in our time, had been ten miles away on a road bordered by wasted land. Or perhaps those areas had been reclaimed by the upsurge in farming during the food-poor years of my last go-around.

I tried to remember something about our hometown that would link somehow with my memory of Carolyn. There was a time when I walked her home from some teenage event, but I could recall nothing of the street — just a vague impression of trees placed here and there, bottom corners of houses and porches caught in streetlamp light. Nothing like the pleasant order of this center-mall park. In that part of our past Carolyn seemed to stand out against a background of shadow, as if always posed for a studio portrait.

An old man, sprawled on a park bench, beckoned to me. His friendliness was fake; he had the concession for this part of the park. But I needed to talk with someone, and that, after all, was what he was there for. Otherwise, I might have to go through rituals with a patrolling prostitute. I could see one heading my way, her cautiously outre get-up announcing her profession. I had already been accosted by a lady of the night working a daytime shift and had found out that these days one could not get away without at least the token purchase of a miniature heart of gold. If their business was that bad, the vigorous morality of my last go-round must have declined.

As I sat down by the old man, I saw that he wasn't old. No surprise, out-of-work actors often cornered this kind of concession. I told him about myself, threw in a few memories of Carolyn, and explained why I had taken refuge in the park. He nodded at most of it and assured me I had done the right thing. After I'd handed him his fee, he put in a plug for the landscape booth located a few feet down the path. The booth, he said, put you into a lovely illusion of trees and mountains which seemed to stretch for miles. I said no thanks, I had no desire for an escape within an escape. But I wondered if, in the booth, there was a viewer, maybe some kind of holographic stereopticon, with which, for the proper price, you could watch an old-time factory town in operation.

"And don't forget, if you get really down, take a gander at the Mars Ship and ponder it, and it'll pick up your spirits, I guarantee," the old man said. Touching his shoulder as his eyes disconnected, I said thank you and good-by, and left the park.

I was no longer early for the party. I had a long argument with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an elevator speaker which insisted that my name was not on its list for admission to the upper levels. Apparently it asked for and received a verification from Lise.

The elevator doors opened onto their foyer, where she waited to greet me. She never seemed to change: the same suggestion of attractive chubbiness in spite of her lithe well-cared-for figure, the same cheer in her eyes as if her sole purpose in life was to build up your spirits, the hollow echo in her voice which undercut the cheeriness.

"Alan! Been looking forward so to seeing you. Bill, Alan's here."

Bill entered the foyer. He looked a bit older than he had appeared on the soap. On TV, I hadn't seen the weary lines around his eyes, had not discerned that the gray-streaked black hair so carefully combed forward was a hair piece.

"Good to see you, Alan," he said, that shyness which I could not resist in his voice. It might be acting, but it made him a comfortable friend.

"You came at a good moment," Lise said. "I don't have to be a hostess for a short time. Some of the guests are wired together; the rest are in the game room."

Bill noticed my puzzled reaction to the phrase *wired together.*

"It's nothing, really," he said, taking me to the living room door and pointing to seven people in a circle, all with apparatus on their heads. Wires, in a complex network, connected each to each. Whatever they were doing, they seemed to be enjoying themselves. "It's not electrical, though it looks like it. Friend of mine, a parapsychological specialist, designed it. Its most practical application is for theater. It's kinda fun, really, and not as dangerous as it looks."

"It doesn't work just right yet," Lise said. "Their minds are all connected, and they get a big thrill out of *that,* but you can control your output, and unless you get somebody who's drunk or stoned, it's all pretty phony, no more than a mental cocktail party chat, except that you get to hear everybody clearly for a change. I like to do it once in a while — I can be a lot sexier through my mind than my physical equipment."

She was, as usual, begging the compliment. I dutifully provided it and she touched my hand.

"How's it going?" Bill said. "Got your sea legs yet?"

"I haven't even come out on deck."

"I can understand that. Last time I came out, I found that a contract I'd spent all sorts of time and energy on, before I went in, had fallen through. Kicked around for a while after that, a few jobs but nothing fulfilling. Then I found I could get my old soap job back —"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yeah, saw you."

"Took it, and I've become the resident purveyor of mediocre cloying advice. I've been thinking about going into freeze again, but Lise doesn't care to this —"

"Doesn't mean *you* can't go."

An edge of sharpness in her voice. Bill ignored her.

"But this time I'm thinking of requesting that my character be killed off. You know, cut my lossess and everything." I nodded. "They say our generation, being the first to have freeze and all, is using it too often. They tell you that?"

"First thing. And, for that matter, last thing."

We moved into the living room, past the wired-up seven. Music surrounded us. Comfortably *old* music with a soft and gentle beat, comfortably quadrophonic. The song I'd forgotten, but I knew it came from college days, and therefore it reminded me of Carolyn. I was eager to look for her, to get these opening formalities over with.

Bill led me to what looked like a mahogany cabinet, which sat between a reader for microfilmed and microfiched material, and a case of stacked and filed microvolumes, the equivalent of a study full of books on reels and cards. As I gazed at the mahogany cabinet, it occurred to me that we'd always expected furnishings of the future to be plastic — then I touched the cabinet and realized that it was, after all, plastic. Bill opened a side panel and palmed a number of lighted squares.

"I wanted especially to show you this," he said. Inside the cabinet some mechanisms flipped around and whirred. The sounds ended as another panel opened and revealed, on a shelf moving out, a pair of books. My book of short stories, *Sieges*, and my novel, *Alicia II*. They had apparently missed my later volume of stories, but what the hell.

"When I switched over my library to micro," he said, "yours were among the few actual books I kept."

"It's always good to see one of my *actual* books."

Lise picked up the two books and handed them to me, opening the flap of one as she did. Evidently to draw my attention to an autograph on the flyleaf. "To Bill and Lise," it said in what unquestionably had once been my steady handwriting, "I'll win forever with such a pair of aces — My best always — love, Alan." I could get no feeling from the shape of the letters that I had really written that. Lise opened the other book for me.

"You never signed this one," she said. "Came out when you weren't around. Or something. We actually *bought* it. Sign."

She held out a pen. Straight-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

armed. I took it and rolled it between my fingers, trying to think. Finally I wrote, in my present shaky script, "To B. and L., See other autograph, it still holds — love, Alan." Glancing at what I'd written, Lise did not seem pleased. Bill placed the books neatly back on the shelf which, after some more button palming, again disappeared so that the cabinet could swallow the volumes. I wondered if they'd ever be seen again.

"Here, look at this," Bill said, sliding away a wall panel. Displayed in front of me was a garish computerlike construction of keyboards, dials, and transparent-tubed tanks which contained different-colored liquids.

"It makes any drink you can think of," he said. "Sort of a computer bartender. Name your poison, and you can have it churning inside you in seconds."

"Velvet Dream," I said, not knowing if there was such a drink.

"Right," he said, and did majestic things with the keyboard. "It's called the Bar-Boy. Every type of whiskey, wine, liqueur, mixer, you name it, is stored in there in logically estimated quantities so that every drink is possible. IBM puts it out, and they run it something like they used to when they put out a lot of typewriters. They bring around refills every month, and there's a service contract which stipulates they have to come out immediately if we run out of anything or if the mechanism fails in any way."

"They're pretty rare," Lise said. "We're practically the only ones in our circle that have one."

"Good money in soaps," Bill said.

"Don't they make typewriters anymore?" I asked. "IBM?"

Bill appeared to think I should be more interested in Bar-Boys than typewriters.

"A few, but it's not one of their chief consumer lines anymore. You probably don't know. Somebody finally developed an efficient voice-writer, and 3-M acquired the patent on it. In combination with duplicating equipment, it's all any office needs, and it's even more popular for home use."

"Most writers are using them," Lise said. "What little writing that's being done nowadays. You should get one, you —" She heard something that I could not hear. "Somebody's arriving, excuse me."

She left for the foyer. Bill handed me my Velvet Dream, which had appeared on a sliding shelf. I tasted it. Smooth. Bill asked me how it compared with other Velvet Dreams. Never having tasted one before, I said it was better. He said Bar-Boys drinks usually were.

"IBM sponsors the soap now," he said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh? I thought they went in for educational programming."

"They changed."

He seemed disturbed, probably because he had to live with the fact that his career had leveled off at something less than educational programming.

A new song blared at me from, it seemed, every compass point of the room.

"What do you think of the sound system?" Bill asked, spreading his arms. I heard what he said, but I was not listening.

"Funny," I said.

"What's funny about it? Reproduces music as faithfully as —"

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean the music. I meant everything, all of this."

He was obviously upset with me, but I had to work out my thought or perish in the Velvet Dream.

"Seems to me I wrote about this kind of room once."

"Well, we've changed it around a lot since you were last —"

"No, I mean — I mean something like deja vu. I wrote up this room, or one like it, as part of a story. A science fiction story."

"You *predicted* —"

"Something like that. More generalized. It was what I expected, but yet I didn't really *expect* it. I *wanted* something else."

"Well, I guess some of you guys had to be right."

From the way Bill fumbled with his glass, I saw that I had violated some critical taboo.

"Check, and we were wrong on a hell of a lot, too, anyway," I said, as banally as I could, and toasted him with my Velvet Dream. He smiled oddly, and I wondered if I would always annoy people I loved.

Lise called for Bill to come to the foyer and greet their new guest. He took my arm and pointed to a closed double door.

"Whyn't you go into the fun room?" he said.

"Fun room? Sounds scary."

He didn't understand.

"Nothing scary, just a glorified game room with more variety. Some games, a few other diversions. A couple illusion-things. Might even be a movie on the tube. I own all the Chaplin films and —"

Lise called again.

"So make yourself comfortable or whatnot. Back with you later."

I passed through the double door, prepared for a stifling atmosphere. But the room was large and only moderately crowded. Everybody was intent on something, and so nobody noticed my entrance. Near the door a man and a woman sat. On their heads were little wired caps that suggested they were involved in some kind of Jewish electric chair ceremony. The man said in a quiet and conversational tone, "Nymph, in thy orisons be all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my sins remembered," and the woman replied, "Good my lord, how does your honor for this many a day?" I gathered that this device was kin to that which the seven were using, and that these two were wired into their own private production of *Hamlet*. With, as I found out later, other players around town. The wired caps not only connected them to their fellow performers, it also provided the illusion of an epic setting.

To my left were more traditional games. Reconstructed battles with small toy armaments that broke apart when hit, a pinball machine whose geography shifted in the midst of play, a hockey game with lifelike skaters responding to the whispered instructions of armchair players. Certain games, like chess and cards, were — to my relief — being played the old-fashioned way.

Three or four television sets, from flat to holo, were on. Other equipment whose functions I did not care to discover sent off gleaming reflections or cast their own light into the relatively dark room. Fearing that someone might invite me to participate in something to which I would be morally opposed, I found an unoccupied area and tried to look distant. At the same time I glanced around to see if Carolyn was involved in any of the diversions. I didn't see her anywhere.

I could not remember the layout of Bill's place well enough to devise a methodical search pattern. But it was a small apartment. If Carolyn was anywhere in it, I'd find her soon enough.

My concentration was so intent that I did not see the approach of the young man. When I became conscious of his interest in me, it was too late to avoid him. He stood directly in front of me, grinning, staring at me with eyes so darkly beautiful it seemed a shame to waste them on such a shabbily constructed face.

"The sham is reflected in your eyes," he said, and smiled. A cruel smile, small mouth and thin lips adding grimness to it.

"What?"

"The sham. This place. This room. Your look of detachment does not hide your contempt for what you see."

"I'm sorry, I don't follow —"

"Drop your politeness. I recognize a fellow perceiver, a critic —"

"You're raising your leg at the wrong tree, my friend."

Suspicious eyes. But he was determined.

"Yeah," he said, "you're the type of person who'd dodge someone like me. At first. No matter. Open up. You can discuss this sham with me."

I looked for an escape route.

"I wouldn't know sham from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shinola," I said. A sizzling comeback, I thought. Except that it was obvious that the young man did not have the first idea what shinola had been.

"To the terrace," he said. With such authority that I never considered saying no.

Placing his hand at my elbow, he guided me. I felt uneasy at being dominated by a young man who was only two thirds my size and weight. Beneath the bland face and lackluster dark hair was a wiry thin body which moved with sureness. I could handle him easily if I could stay out of range of his eyes.

The terrace was the best feature of Bill's place. The money he had earned in his acting career really seemed on display there. It was massive. All the people who could be crowded into the four or five rooms of the apartment could also be squeezed onto the terrace with only, say, a dozen or so having to be dumped over the edge. Carefully arranged patio furniture seemed modernistic in design — attractive if you like pastel-colored metal — and there was imposing beauty in the way greenery and flowers were arranged on and above the ledges. You always had to push aside a leaf, fern, or petal to get a look at the city outside.

"Beautiful, this terrace," I said. A foolish remark, perhaps, considering the young man's beliefs. I squinted to get a twilight view of the people milling around.

"Yeah, I guess it's pretty," he said. Something of a concession noted and filed in his voice. "They're lucky not to face the Mars Ship side of the building."

"The what side?"

"Mars Ship."

He narrowed his eyes. I felt safe for a moment, but unfortunately he widened them again.

"I see. You don't know the Mars Ship?"

"No."

"You're lucky. Talk about sham —"

He was set to provide a complete analysis, but I was saved from hearing it just then because Carolyn came onto the terrace from another room. I'm afraid I left the young man in midsham.

Carolyn was not aware of my approach, and so I had time to study her. She had aged in ways that I could approve. She'd put on some weight in the torso and hips, accenting further her narrow waist. For some reason I remembered the firm line of her rib cage when she was wearing a bathing suit or a strangely fashioned dress. An odd memory, perhaps, but the one that came to me then as I looked at her body.

Her face seemed thinner. She still wore the same style of eyeglasses, framed in good prim black,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pointed at the sides. Of those women who still preferred glasses to lenses, few chose that type anymore. Her hair was long and looked just-combed — I've always hated carefully styled hair — and there were shiny streaks of grey softening the brunette. I knew that most men would not find her beautiful, but that did not keep me from heading right for her. With anxiety in my heart, anticipation in my soul, broken fences in the boundary of my hyperbole.

She walked alone to the terrace railing, not looking at anyone. No one seemed interested in her. She positioned an arm on the railing but didn't try to push aside greenery for a view.

I stood behind her and spoke softly:

"You're looking usual and ever."

She turned.

"Hello, Alan, how nice to see you. Lise said you were here. I just arrived."

"By yourself?"

"No, my husband's with me. He wandered off into the fun room."

Her eyes were still good, still a gentle blue, no destructive lines and shadows around them. She looked at me as if I were made of precious stone. Perhaps she looked at everybody that way, perhaps it was poor eyesight, but I preferred to romanticize.

"Jack?" I asked.

"Jack?"

"Your husband, is it Jack?"

Her face reddened slightly.

"No. No, I haven't been married to Jack for, oh, years. Hard to remember. With freezing I lose track of actual time, but it was a good many years ago."

"Each go-around's almost a different lifetime, I guess."

How quickly she reduced me to banalities.

"Yes. Funny."

"What?"

"Jack. He decided against cryogenics. Given the natural process, he's an old, old man now. Or dead. I've never tried to find out."

"I have a younger brother who's older than I am."

"That can happen, can't it?"

"Sure can."

And silence. So many years since we had last met, so many years since she had run off with her now-decrepit or turned-to-dust athlete, and I'd run out of conversation in a minute. She looked away, at a browning leaf. I laughed conversationally. She looked back and smiled. I tried to find something for my blank mind to focus upon. She restored her concentration on the dying leaf. I wanted to leap gracefully over the ledge.

"You two hashing up old times?" said Bill, a purple Bar-Boy drink in his hand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Not exactly," Carolyn said.

"Old times are —" For a moment I could not think of a finish. "Old times should never be thawed among old friends."

Bill laughed. It always disturbs me when friends laugh at my dumb remarks. Makes my genuine wit suspect. But I suppose Bill's laugh should have a different social weight.

"I have one of those player pianos," Bill said, his tongue not exactly thick with drink, but not thin with sobriety either. "You know, the kind with a computer attached. Can play almost any tune you can think of, 'specially old ones. Want to go in and punch something out while we're in an old times mood?"

"We're not in an old times mood," I said.

"I thought we were."

"You are, maybe. We're not."

"Of course we are," Carolyn said. "Face it, it's inevitable. Whatever trite thing I may say to either of you, I am thinking of various adventures from our faded youth."

"So am I," I admitted.

"Now that that's settled," Bill said, "anybody for old songs?"

"I'm sorry, Bill," I said, "not right now. I'd like to spend sunset here on the terrace."

"Yeah, well, enjoy what weather you can. I think there's an hour or two of rain on the schedule after sunset. Excuse me, I believe Lise needs something."

He walked away, a light stagger marring the confident actor's stride. Some people left a nearby table, and I suggested to Carolyn that we sit there. I considered sitting politely across from her, but instead I chose the chair beside her and pulled it nearer to her. After another awkward silence I brought up the safe subject of Bill's fun room. She said her husband loved games but she could not remain interested long enough to get much out of them. I made a few points about the theory of games, straining to make my word choices apt and incisive. She smiled affably at the right points, but in all other ways seemed distant. There was no energy in her speech, a certain unnecessary effort to her smile, a lethargy in her movements. Her lassitude made me try harder to add special effects to my remarks. I felt myself forcing words out. They seemed to hang in the air, in frightful poses. Carolyn's smile grew fainter, her eyes less focused.

I decided that, with time so much against me and the chance we might meet again so remote, I would attack more directly.

"You seem so bored even if you were interested in what I say, you'd be too bored to show it."

"Don't spring tactics on me, damn it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm sorry, I —"

"Please, that's all right." She briefly touched the back of my wrist, a neutral zone. "You're forgiven. I have no ability to carry on either a tirade or an argument. Just be fair. No, don't be fair. Instead, avoid being direct. I learned small talk with both my husbands. Try more small talk on me, I'll impress you."

"I don't want to be *impressed*."

"Pleased? Entertained? Diverted?"

"Let me say one thing, just one thing. I came here tonight to see you and *only* to see you. I'll abide by whatever rules you set up just for the privilege of following *your* rules. So you can muzzle me if you want, but, Jesus, we probably won't meet again for —"

"All the more reason for small talk. Sorry to cut you off, but it's not a subject I care to pursue — not with you. I'd have to leave."

We were in the shadowy part of the sunset hour, and I could hardly see her face.

"And I don't want to go."

Most of my life I have not obeyed the impulse to reach out and touch someone when I wanted to. Usually I find neutral places for my hands — pockets, table edges, malleable objects. This time I started to reach for an abandoned Bar-Boy glass, but her hand was too close to it. For once I obeyed my impulse. I grabbed her hand and held it in the manner of an adolescent, not quite sure of the acceptable grip. She made no attempt to disengage, but did stare at my hand covering hers.

"That's a dumb thing to do after what I just said."

"Sure it is. But go ahead, make small talk, or whatever your rules provide."

"Did we ever hold hands before?"

"Not that I can remember. Not in any but the chastest circumstances, I'm sure."

"Feels like we have. Your touch is familiar."

"I have one of that kind of hands."

"Just one?"

"Well, the other is — it's more distant."

I think she almost smiled. Hard to tell in the fading sunlight. I was terrified that somebody might turn on some lights and rob me of this interlude.

"This is silly," she said.

"But it's small talk."

"That it is."

"Are you an advocate of programmed or natural weather?"

"I believe in the abolishment of weather altogether."

"Still inclined toward radical solutions, I guess."

"I guess."

"Do you like the Mars Ship?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What Mars Ship?"

"You don't know either?"

"Should I?"

"Apparently."

"Well, I live in the sticks. The only Mars Ship I know of, the only voyage to Mars I'm *aware* of, exploded on the return trip. Surely you know about that."

"No, I don't."

"It was our first and only trip to Mars, and it exploded and set back our space-travel program, and it was all very tragic. I watched it on TV, cried for days. And you've never heard about it."

"When did it happen?"

"A while ago. Seven, eight years ago."

"That explains it. I was in deep freeze and just came out today. It takes a while to get briefed on everything."

"Oh. We should have guessed, I suppose. There's so much discontinuity these days, I never really catch up myself."

Her voice had become animated. I was excited with myself for bringing her out of her lethargy. In spite of the impending darkness, I could see her eyes better than before. She looked younger, I thought — which meant of course that I was younger, hooked on the same fantasy that had marred a good part of my youth.

"It's really good to see you again." I said.

"Yes, I'm glad, too."

Our eyes met — classic style. But the irony in her eyes must have undercut the stupid adoration in mine. We held the gaze for a pleasant few seconds, then she seemed to think better of the situation. She withdrew her hand and looked away.

"It's always nice to see an old friend," she said, with some of the detachment returned to her voice. "All that seems so long ago now. Hard to remember we were ever that way my husband is coming."

She said it like that, naturally, attaching "my husband is coming" to the end of the sentance as if it were a sensible subordinate clause to a statement on the good old days. In a way, it was.

Her smile for him was unlike the warm-friendship smile she'd been using for me. It was a private smile, one that signaled something between her and her husband. And it could have meant anything.

I turned to watch his approach and felt like Muhammad welcoming the mountain. He was large — barrel-chested, big-armed, muscles upon muscles. I glanced down at his wide feet to see if he was about to kick any sand in my face. I looked higher, expected to see a fierce-looking, gone-to-seed left tackle; instead, the fact atop this mountain was angelic and his smile sent love to Carolyn.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She introduced us, saying I was a figment from her deep-dark past. His name was Scott, Scott Jarvis. Good solid name, good solid man. Carolyn's first husband, the dumb jock, would have looked like a crumpled matchstick next to this one, and his sullenness would have contrasted sharply with Scott's beaming affability. I felt that somehow I had lost a game for which nobody had handed me a rulebook. Irritated, I looked away from Scott and tried to detect love for him in Carolyn, Carolyn Jarvis.

She watched the two of us, an odd, almost calculated smile on her face. Scott and I got on a first-name basis immediately, more because of his geniality than mine.

"What do you do back in Albany, Scott?"

"Rensselaer, actually, Al, just across the river from Albany. I have a chain of gyms, spas, you know, that sort of health thing."

"Should have guessed."

"I guess I do look like some kind of a health nut, eh, Al?"

"You do seem to belong in that, uh, that kind of health thing. You're a good advertisement for your own business, Scott."

"Surprisingly enough, don't have to advertise. I've managed to pick up my clientele by word of mouth mostly, Al."

"Didn't think that was possible anymore."

"Well, if you've got a good product, I guess people turn out. And I get around. I belong to a lot of clubs, you know, Chamber of Commerce, a couple of country clubs, and those service club kind of things, Al. Only real ads I bother with are small ones in the local papers, on the sports pages."

"Read 'em all the time."

"But that's about it. Don't use any of the big media. Had a chance once to have a local holovision morning program all my own, but I turned it down. I didn't want the business ... tainted, you know?"

"I understand, Scott. Dignity, Scott. I understand."

I glanced at Carolyn to see if she was impressed with my restraint. Her face was impassive, but the way she had shifted position — placing more space between us, leaning toward Scott — seemed to mean annoyance with me, or maybe it was only marital allegiance. She placed a hand on Scott's enormous forearm. He responded with a brief affectionate grin, then returned his attention to me, obviously interested in what I had to say. I get very tense when people who I am trying to dislike are interested in me.

He started to speak again but was distracted by a figure standing at the open side of our table. I looked up and saw the bright-eyed young man who had assaulted me in the fun room. He greeted Scott.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Hey, Edwin," Scott said. "Carolyn, this is Edwin — what was your last name?"

"Needles."

He mumbled the name, the way people do when they have had to live with a name they don't much care for.

"I guess you didn't tell me your last name before, Edwin. Needles, hey? Must mean you're sharp."

"No, I'm afraid then I'd be named Tacks."

"Right, right. Good. Anyway, this is my wife, strange as it may seem in these low-marriage-rate days. My dear wife, Carolyn."

"How do you do, Mrs. Jarvis."

Scott introduced him to me, and he nodded as if we had not talked earlier. I could not believe that this apparently soft-spoken young man was the person who had been so opposed to sham in the fun room.

"Al's a writer," Scott said.

Edwin raised the watt power of his dangerous eyes. Scott asked him to sit with us. A couple of lights came on nearby. Evidently Bill had switched them on for us, since we were the only people still out on the dark terrace.

"I think I almost recognize your name," Edwin said. "What sort of stuff you put out?"

I supplied a brief self-effacing description.

"I read a novel once in a while, Al," Scott said.

"Ever tried *Babbitt*?" I asked.

Carolyn almost said something — a change of topic, I suspect.

"No, I haven't," Scott said, showing no reaction to the sarcasm. "But I've heard of it. I know what it's about, I think. It's not sci-fi, as I recall."

"No, not exactly, Scott."

"My tastes run more to philosophy. Schopenhauer, Bertie Russell, Spinoza, Sartre. I read a bit of Sartre almost every day. Do you like Sartre, Al?"

"I never could read him. I'm not, uh, not too good with philosophy."

"Scott's something of an expert on Sartre," Carolyn said. She looked much too pleased. "He's had a couple papers published on him."

"Nothing much. Just a couple of strange ideas that came to me."

I felt miserable. Not only was the guy an Adonis, a successful businessman, the husband of the woman I adored, but he had to be an expert on philosophy, too. It was getting easier to hate him.

"We still read science fiction," Edwin said.

"*We*?" I asked.

"My circle. It's quite in vogue really. Not many people are writing anything these days, and most of it isn't worthwhile. Maybe we're reading something of yours and that's why I recognized the name."

"Maybe."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I wanted to turn the conversation away from writing. Even superficial literary talk made me nervous. I leaned towards Scott:

"What are health spas like these days? I'm recently out of freeze and haven't got around much yet."

"Not much different that ever, I expect. We can do a lot of things in squeezed space, of course."

"What's that?"

"Rather esoteric slang, I expect. I'm sorry. It's what the wholesalers call illusion machines — you know, where you step into a confining box or room and there's an illusion of an expanse of space around you ...."

"I know about them, but've never used one in any way."

"That's surprising. They're everywhere. Bill's got one in his fun room —"

"You go into an Old West shootout," Edwin interrupted, something of a sneer in his voice, "and have showdowns with a mob of gunfighters. Nobody falls unless you shoot at them."

"That's right, Edwin. The kind we use are, for example, the client goes in and seems to be climbing a mountain — the mechanics are set up so that not only does he get the satisfaction of scaling a height, he also gets the necessary exercise. Adds a little drama to the whole dull business of exercising."

"The whole dull business," Carolyn said, and looked at me. Scott's response was a bit brusque, a husband flashing signals.

"Well, they do perk it up for the client."

"They do," Carolyn said. Her smile, directed at Scott, also had a great deal of marital content to it.

"I wouldn't be caught dead in a spa," Edwin said. "My whole group is against them, they're all wrong for —"

"Is your *group* organized?" I interrupted. "With a name? Experts, Inc., or something like that?"

"No, I don't mean anything like that." A shade of anger in his voice, I'd irritated him. "I mean the people who are my friends, who I do things with, discuss things with. The only organization to us is a shared set of beliefs."

"I think I belonged to that organization once. Carolyn and I." I turned to her. "Do you think?"

"I think so."

"How could you belong to an organization that isn't an organization?" Edwin said, not too pleased with the way the conversation was going.

"Never mind, Edwin. I was being smartass. Sorry."

He obviously did not know whether to believe me. I cursed myself for playing the provocateur for such frivolous reasons. How-

LICENSED TO MAGZOO
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ever, I had started something. Scott rested his massive arms on the table and looked into Edwin's eyes.

"You're against illusion machines?" he asked.

"Not just illusion machines. Everything. Illusion machines, cryonics, Bar-Boys, the Mars Ship, all of it."

"And what does your group believe should be done about them? Destruction?"

"No, not at all. We believe that the people who want to use the, uh, benefits provided by this culture, fine. Let them use them. But they are not for *us*."

"And your group would just avoid use of them. Is that right, Edwin?"

"Yes, but we're not a group in *that* sense, just people who happen to believe in the same —"

"But what do you propose as an alternative, Edwin?"

"Are alternatives really necessary? We just want to live without the gimmicks —"

"But shouldn't you have some kind of a plan, an ideology, to hold you together?"

"Scott, you understand what he means," Carolyn said, again placing her hand on his arm.

"No, I don't, Carolyn. She thinks I'm prodding you, Edwin, but I really just want to know."

"I understand you. But I'm trying to say, we really don't have any sort of plan. We just think that there's little to involve us in this kind of life, the kind of life our parents lived, and we are seeking something simpler, maybe going back to the simple kind of family life of the past."

"But you have to define what type of family life; there are all kinds of family, Edwin."

"No, he doesn't, Scott," Carolyn said. She sounded a little desperate, as if she often footnoted Scott in this way.

"Don't you have something in the nature of an ideology?"

"Nothing special, just a few ideas, I suppose."

"Just a few *disorganized* ideas, from the sound of it. But you could have an ideology based on the assumption that the alienation of mid-twentieth century man has continued into the present time because the institutions which support our culture have more and more become inhumane, insensitive to the individual's needs. It's not man's inhumanity to man that's destructive to the human spirit nowadays. Man's inhumanity to man would at least show we are still alive. No, Edwin, today we are assaulted by a pronoun. *It*. Not man's inhumanity to man, but *its* inhamanity to man. That's what should be fought. The reduction of the forces against man to the impersonal pronoun — which is so

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

diffused throughout our society that there is no one single target against which to launch an attack. As a result, people are losing their character. They are lifeless. What you must give back to people is their life and their character."

Scott took a breath. Carolyn appeared resigned.

"All we want to do is re-establish a few simple institutions. Wouldn't that do what you say?"

"For a few people, Edwin. For your little dedicated group, perhaps. But, in any social condition, retreat has not solved the problems. No — attack, Edwin. Keep your ideas, they're on the right track, but expand them and find ways in which you can change the conditions of today instead of merely complaining about them and setting yourself off in little pockets of families...."

"Attack? But how?"

"Blow up a few health spas," I said.

Carolyn did not know whether to smile or glare at me. Edwin's eyes seemed friendly. Scott looked uneasy.

There was a long silence.

"What do you think of programmed weather, Edwin?" I asked.

"I'm not sure about it, but I do know that it is about to rain and we should probably go inside off this terrace."

A good idea, it seemed. The rain started as soon as we moved into the crowded living room. Edwin considered staying with me — his ally, after all, in the finale of the terrace conversation — but he decided instead to drift over to some friends who clustered nearby. Maybe all agreeing with each other on something. Scott leaned toward me and said in a low voice:

"I can't seem to get along with his kind. Last time I was in tune with the times, but, I'll tell you, that feeling didn't last for long. I mean, when I was a kid, I was in rebellion, too — so were you, I'll bet — but at least we marched and demonstrated, and some of us advocated good solid Marxist ideas. But I'm amazed at how younger people now don't seem to care about improving the quality of their society. Hell, they go completely blank when you talk to them about life. Like that kid Edwin. Jeez, maybe it's time for me to withdraw again."

"Jeez, maybe it is," I said, looking at Carolyn, who was genuinely ignoring us. Feeling that it would be better for her if I changed the subject, I said, with real interest, "Tell me, Scott, I've wondered about you people who have relatively permanent careers, in business and all. It's easy for artists and idlers to go into freeze, but how does it affect the businessmen?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Easy enough, Al. After you get a business started and really going, it's not hard for it to continue while you're gone. Also, I have a couple of partners, and one of us is usually around. Top of that, I generally stay with something only as long as it keeps my interest. The spa chain is the fourth business I've started. When it's going and I get bored with it, I'm just as glad to get away from it. And when I thaw I feel like getting into some new kind of enterprise. So it all works out." He rattled all this off as if he were reading it from a preface to a brochure. It could, after all, easily be a set answer to one of the set questions of the day. "Hey, I see a friend of ours just came in. Excuse us."

Not wanting to excuse them just then, I said nothing. They moved away and joined some people who looked like them. For a while I studied one of the women in the group and noticed how like Carolyn she was, both in looks and movement. She even wore glasses, and it was certainly rare to see two women in the same room wearing glasses. During a moment when she had no interest in the talk, she glanced my way and I flashed her the same smile I would have flashed at Carolyn. She was slightly embarrassed, but no more so than Carolyn would have been. Someone said something to her and she rejoined the conversation, carefully avoiding any looks in my direction.

"Can't take your eyes off her, can you?" whispered Lise, who had sneaked up on me. She looked very cherubic and irresistible.

"What makes you think that?"

"I've been watching you. Hawk's eyes. You gape at Carolyn like a boy."

"But I wasn't looking at her."

"Oh, yeah?"

"I was looking at that other girl."

"Of course."

I could tell, from her hawk's eyes, that I would never convince her. So I shrugged, pretending she had really caught me. While Lise continued to chatter, I figured I might as well assume guilt and gaze at Carolyn. She stood just outside her circle of people and gave glances of encouragement to her husband, who dominated the conversation. I had the impression that Scott made an effort to control the interests of any group he found himself in. He was a serious man, Scott was, interested in the serious matters that concern serious people. Serious texts rolled off his serious tongue, serious meanings glowed from his serious eyes.

Lise apparently read my mind.

"What do you think of Scott?"

She sipped at her drink, a diversion which did not hide her satisfaction with herself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He seems run down to me. He should go to a health spa once in a while."

"But, darling, he runs a whole —"

Lise stopped and I smiled, caught you. Bill broke away from a group and, at Lise's nod, came over to us.

"Enjoying yourself? Want another drink?"

"In a minute. What happened to the wired-up seven?"

"Them? They're around — in different places."

"A trial separation?"

"About it."

Lise surveyed the room, looking for an excuse to leave. Bill's index finger circled the bottom of his Bar-Boy glass. Two attempts at bringing up new subjects failed. Finally, Bill said:

"Come with me, got something to show you."

He led me to the other side of the room. Lise invaded an adjacent group of women. The trip cut off my view of Carolyn. Bill opened a wall panel and slid out a small machine, which I recognized instantly as an InfoFax. Its purpose was to provide information, and it did so in various forms — press a button, and you could get one of any number of daily newspapers, another button and out came the latest issue of a selected magazine, another button and a fact sheet on a selected subject emerged.

"This's got the latest attachments," Bill said. "It's expanded what it used to be able to do. For example, look at this new panel." It was a typewriter keyboard. "You press this large button, then type out the category of subject you want information on. Here, let me show you. Name a subject."

I suggested cryogenics. Bill nodded, pressed the button, then typed out the word cryogenics on the keyboard. About thirty seconds of Bill smiling nervously passed, and a long sheet of paper came out of the machine's side. Bill took it and showed me a list of several titles followed by what looked like serial numbers.

"You choose what items might interest you, then punch out the numbers on the keyboard, and, in a few seconds, that particular article or picture or piece of writing falls into the tray. It's keyed to current publications rather than *all* the writing available on the subject. I understand, though, that they're building a more encyclopedic attachment for library use. Here, why don't you play with it for a while?"

He backed away from me with a pleased smile, happy to have found a toy to occupy me. He made his way to Bar-Boy. I stared at the list of articles, realizing from the titles that I did not want to see any of them. Then I stared at InfoFax for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

two or three minutes, trying to think of a subject that would interest me enough to acquire information on it. Suddenly I got a brainstorm, punched the control button on the keyboard, and typed out my name.

An anxious thirty seconds passed as I waited for the information sheet. Finally it popped out with an embarrassed little *ping*. The large sheet of paper had only one title on it: "The Myopic Visionaries of the Future," followed by a serial number which I immediately punched out.

Another thirty seconds and the article arrived. It was a two-pager, apparently from a journal of literary criticism, although the magazine's name in the heading was too blurred to read.

I forced my way through the writer's initial premises, searching in vain for my name. The critic seemed to feel that, while a certain top-level of science fiction writing for the past few decades remained first-rate and unassailable, there had been more deadwoood useless work done in the field than any genre had a right to expect. He felt that many of the writers wrote from a negative set of attitudes which he characterized as myopic. It has been a period, he said, of negative incapability. Stories of the time lacked a sense of human dignity and failed to look with wonder at the potential which the future offered — two ingredients that he felt were essential to effective sf. Although, he said, there was room for other views if handled with some fervor or passion.

So this kind of critic, hiding behind carefully defined words which he had deprived of sensible meaning, still flourished. Hemming in my anger, I carefully read the rest of his predictable remarks, marveling at how such critics could continually offend my sense of human dignity by donning the easy guise of positivism.

My name did not appear until the end of the article. To support a point that most of the stories of the time merely extrapolated current events into an unlikely paranoid future, he cited my story "Hell on Tires" — an otherwise-forgotten story about a time when automobiles would no longer be manufacturd and would be used only by the privileged and by outcasts roaming abandoned superhighways — as an example of a story that was not only an inaccurate prediction but was also a mean-spirited attempt to denigrate the potential of the human spirit. Stories like this, he said, were not merely myopic in their erroneous views of the future, they were equally near-sighted in their misguided view of their own time. As I clutched the paper, I almost poked a hole in it. I remem-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bered how, in the days when I'd made an abortive struggle toward a Ph.D. in English, I had been capable of just such inverted logic and random categorization.

"What're you reading?"

I looked over and down — at Edwin Needles staring up at the paper. I had the urge to lie, but instead handed the article to him. He read it with speed, and his eyes widened when he came to the mention of me.

"I remember that story now. We were just talking about it some time in the last few days. So that's who you are, why your name's familiar. We liked the story still, most of us."

I glared at him.

"I liked it."

He studied me to see how far he could go, then decided pretty far.

"And this guy's stupid, he's wrong. Sure, things didn't happen exactly as you said, but we do have control over cars, and people of that time wouldn't recognize the combustion engine of today, nor would they have expected to find free cars all over most cities ...."

"Yes, I heard about the free cars. I gathered everybody's proud of them."

"Proud as they are of anything else that the human spirit, to borrow your friend here's words, has achieved in this era."

"Another sham, eh?"

"By the book."

Carolyn, led by Scott, came back into view. They stopped to talk to a group next to the Bar-Boy. Bill said something to Carolyn and glanced at me as he said it. I could see her profile; she did not seem to react to whatever Bill said. Scott started arguing a point and, for a moment, blocked my view of both Bill and Carolyn, but the vehemence of his opinions drove him into the center of the group, and I saw Carolyn again. Her face bore the same distant look that I'd first seen on the terrace.

"You should write some more," Edwin said. "Your kind of point of view would swing a lot of weight for my generation."

He said it as if there were something worthwhile in the goal.

"You think so?"

Carolyn stood like somebody who is not aware that anyone would like to look at her. I wanted her to straighten up and not look so matronly.

"We need the truth," Edwin said. "We don't have many people writing for *us*, you know. Hardly anybody writing for anybody these days. Just a bunch of hacks reeling out copy for the InfoManiac."

I almost had not heard him, so intently was I concentrating on Carolyn, cataloguing all the flaws in her body posture, her detachment.

LICENSED TO GNE.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A what, did you say?"

"An InfoManiac. InfoFax, then. That's what we call it, this machine."

"Oh."

I looked back at her. As Scott forced himself further into the group she took a step or two backward. Bill watched her, both drink and desire in his eyes.

"They've already led us to moral suicide," Edwin said. "It's only a step more to the mass suicide of the race."

"Sounds like an interesting way to go."

"You're not following. I would've thought you'd understand better."

"No, I don't understand well, Edwin. Or listen well, for that matter. Sorry. Really."

Carolyn had held the same pose for so long, she could have been a statue. A statue to what? Not anything uplifting or patriotic, certainly. A statue to me, perhaps.

"Yeah, you could pick up quite a following probably. None of us write much. So it's like new territory for you. You could do it, I think. If I remember your story right, that is."

"You probably do. Unfortunately."

"Unfortunately?"

"I'm sorry, you did it to me again, Edwin. You should watch your wicked tongue."

"I don't get it."

"If you're going to feed me a certain kind of dumb line, I'm going to throw back a certain kind of dumb response. I'm that type, and you'll find that you'll have to keep forgiving me."

Scott had all the group laughing with something he said. Except for Carolyn. Bill looked to her for a reaction, too, and seemed disappointed by what he saw. He leaned toward her and whispered. She glanced at him, but again did not react. He seemed puzzled as he downed the last of his Bar-Boy drink and turned to the machine for another. Scott milked a follow-up laugh.

"You apologize a lot. In fact, there's an awful lot of self-pity in your —"

"I'm going to apologize again. I'm sorry, Edwin, but I'm going to walk away from you again before you've finished your next sentence."

"Wait a minute, I —"

I walked away from him, wearing the pain in his voice like a backpack. I headed toward Carolyn, who had not moved an inch. Bill had just turned away from Bar-Boy and was raising the glass to his mouth. I nodded to him as I took Carolyn's arm, turned her around with more ease than I had expected, and led her away from the group. I did not look back to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

see if Scott had noticed.

"Did you bring a coat or anything?" I asked.

"A sweater. What are you doing?"

"Don't ask questions. We might be being followed. The sweater is in the closet?"

"I imagine. Why do you ask? Am I to get it?

"Will you? I just want to talk or something for a few minutes. But outdoors."

We stopped. I expected her to wriggle out of my grasp and run back to her husband. Instead she said:

"Okay. Let me get it. You wait by the elevator."

I let go, and she walked away. I went to the elevator. Standing there, I looked back into the room. Scott was still entertaining his group, apparently unaware that Carolyn no longer sent him silent encouragement. Bill was looking directly at me. He appeared to be unsure whether he had any responsibility in whatever he imagined the situation to be. Or his glum look perhaps had something to do with the failure of the pass he'd not quite made.

Carolyn emerged from the walk-in closet, glanced toward Scott, hesitated a moment, then turned toward the elevator. She was approaching on my right. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw another figure obviously coming toward me from the left. Suddenly conscious of my heartbeat, I looked that way, fearful that, after all, Scott had noticed and was sketching a blur toward me. But it wasn't him. It was only Edwin.

Behind me, the elevator arrived. My back against the leading edge, I held the doors open. Carolyn seemed a bit ahead of Edwin in the race to the elevator. But he walked faster. She passed me just a couple steps ahead of him. As she crossed the threshold, I slid off the leading edge, and the doors started to close. But Edwin — good old quick-of-reflex Edwin — took a last jump and squeezed between them, an odd smile twisting his features.

"You guys had the right idea," he said, "getting out of there. You could have been reading my mind."

"I hope not," I said.

"Am I interrupting something?" He nodded toward Carolyn, then looked back at me. "I only want to get out and get some air, so if I'm —"

I tried to find some meaning in his glowing dangerous eyes. Was he really so naive that he could ignore my callous treatment? Or was something about me so important to him that he must pursue me in spite of my obvious reluctance to acknowledge him? Or was there something treacherous in him that had caused him to appoint himself

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as my personal demon? All I could see in his eyes was a kind of desperate need, but need of what?

"No, Edwin, you're not interrupting a thing," I said, and smiled helplessly at Carolyn. She took my hand, squeezed it lightly, released it. "I bid you one of my rare sincere welcomes."

"Welcome from me, too," Carolyn said. Warmly. With a smile. I wondered if Edwin exerted some kind of control over her, if those eyes cast rays on all of us.

"Okay," Edwin said, happy with winning. "Where we going?"

"Just out."

"Out's good enough for me."

We reached the main floor. Edwin held the door of the elevator and bowed us out, with some flourish. In the lobby I tried to take Carolyn's arm, but she countered by settling the sweater around her shoulders. Edwin skipped ahead, in order to repeat his duty with the front doors of the apartment house. Unfortunately, they were operated by an electric eye, and they sprung open just as he was reaching for them. But, dauntless little fellow that he was, he did not stop or break stride. Doing a little time-step, he shuffled on through the doorway.

"I see you're still attracting magical people," Carolyn said.

"Edwin? Magical? Madam, he is not mine and I make no claim nor take any credit for him."

"He's cute."

"Not quite the word I would have chosen."

"Well, to use a better word, he's ... he's cute."

We walked out the door. Edwin stood under the outside awning, looking out at the dark wet streets.

"The rain'll be over in about four minutes, according to my calculations."

"Let's go walk in it," Carolyn said.

"Okay," Edwin said.

"Are you sure?" I asked. "It's coming down pretty hard. You could get very damp."

"That's the idea."

Edwin led the way. He strode about two steps ahead of us and talked to us over his shoulder. I stayed close to Carolyn. Although the rain was steady, it came down in soft light drops.

"Doesn't all this remind you of Copenhagen?" I said.

"I've never been to Copenhagen," Carolyn said.

"Neither have I."

A dumb joke, but it caused her to squeeze my hand again. This time I held onto her hand, and she did not attempt to disengage.

"I can't remember a thing about Copenhagen," Edwin said.

"Neither do I," I said.

"But you just said you've never been there."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh. Yeah."

Edwin worked up an excruciating facial expression that could have meant contempt or confusion. It probably did not mean anything favorable.

"I'm old," I said.

He accepted that. Which bothered me.

I glanced at a clock in a store window. Near ten thirty. Much later than I thought it should be, later than it felt like in this dusklike darkness. It had seemed much darker from the windows of Bill and Lise's place than it did here in the streets. I assumed it was some sort of city light phenomenon and concentrated on holding Carolyn's hand. Squeezing it gently, I waited for a response. She chuckled weirdly, then slowly, gently began to intertwine her fingers with mine. I remembered more vividly the high school time when I'd walked her home in a gathering darkness.

"Your smile is — it's not exactly nice," Carolyn said.

"Didn't mean for it to show."

"What?"

"Just thinking about something from the past."

"So was I. But we should stop it."

"Why?"

"Not healthy."

"I never read where reminiscence isn't healthy. Granted, Proust was an invalid, but —"

"I mean nostalgia for the past isn't healthy, especially our past."

"It's healthy for me. I draw energy from it."

"You sure of that? You haven't looked too overflowing with energy tonight — particularly for somebody who's just been thawed."

"Yeah, I remember you said you were just out of freeze," Edwin interrupted. I had managed to ignore the fact that he was there, a steady two steps ahead of us. Now I had to talk to him — break a mood that I was carefully controlling just to speak to him.

"How long ago did you come out?" he asked.

"Just yesterday, matter of fact."

"Yesterday. No wonder then."

"No wonder *what*, Edwin?"

"No wonder you seem so vague sometimes, so disoriented. Why you make such strange coments on things, why you ...."

"No, that isn't why, I'm afraid."

"Yes," said Carolyn. "It could be, I mean. Strange new surroundings, strange comments, as Edwin says."

Edwin's eyes sent her a gratitude ray.

"I don't make strange comments. From your point of view, Edwin, they may seem strange. Even your *entire* group might find them strange, but to me they are perfectly sensible."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Alan, no," Carolyn whispered.

Edwin seemed about to say something; then he changed his mind and shrugged. His attention was caught by a display in a store window. He performed an abrupt left turn, crossed in front of us, and marched to the window. We followed and looked over his shoulder.

Inside the window various pieces of baseball equipment were arranged at different levels. Interspersed with the gloves, bats, baseballs, and uniforms were pictures, most of them depicting the highlights of a player named Wilton "The Wrecker" Recher. Having been out of touch with the sport since proving to my sportsman father that I had no abilities at punching a horsehide ovoid with a cylindrical stick of wood, I asked Edwin:

"Who is he?"

"You don't know the Wrecker?"

"Nope."

"But his playing career was years ago."

"I don't keep track of sports."

Edwin's face said low inside, strike two.

"He was a great player, perhaps would have been the greatest."

"Could've been?"

"Yeah. He had one of the greatest years in baseball — a .399 batting average, sixty-three home runs, I don't know how many *RBI's* but a record anyway, and all at the age of twenty-two — and many thought that his character was irreproachable."

"What happened, he become a burnt-out case?"

"Only literally. He killed himself during the off-season of that year, shot himself through the head."

"Why'd he do that?"

"Nobody knows. Some say he was a fag and had lost his lover — a sportscaster, they say. But we don't believe that."

"We? Oh, we."

"Yes, he's sort of a culture hero with us. We like the idea of a man achieving the best in his profession, then turning his back on it, even by killing himself — which is, I admit, an extreme way of doing it."

He stopped looking at the display just as abruptly as he'd noticed it in the first place. He resumed walking, and we hurried to catch up to our place two steps behind them.

"You like baseball, then, Edwin," Carolyn said.

"Some."

"Your enthusiasm seemed to indicate an avid interest."

"Well, we used to play it a lot, but we don't so much any more."

The rain had stopped. I hadn't noticed when it had ended, but now a warm breeze both dried us off and made us comfortable.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Do you remember Joe Hellman?" I asked Carolyn.

"The name's familiar."

"He was in our high school class. The athlete. Star of all sports."

"Oh, yes. Why do you ask?"

I thought: Because, dear one, I am aware of your unnatural lust for athletic types, and I am hoping to castrate the myth in my own solemn subtle way. I said:

"No special reason. Just talking about baseball reminded me of him. I remember one of his games, there was a close play at the plate. The ball was overthrown, though, and Joe seemed to see that. Didn't bother him one jot. He crashed into the opposing catcher as if the play was close. At the same time he held his elbow out and up and hit the other player in the jaw. Maybe even broke the jaw. Anyway, the catcher was a bloody mess and Joe Hellman bragged about it."

"You're efficient at nostalgia, you know that?"

"Sorry."

"Few of the younger kids today even go into sports," Edwin interjected. "The major leagues are really hurting. The Jap clubs folded up altogether, and most of the rest of the teams are fielding old men who normally would have retired by now. Maybe the Wrecker knew what was coming. Maybe he —"

Edwin's attention was distracted this time by a stretch of sidewalk. In contrast to the rest of the street, this area was littered. Cigarettes squashed out, crumpled-up paper, a cellophane sheet floating lightly in the breeze. Something was wrong with the Refuse Removal Unit at curbside, and the debris had not been drawn to it. Edwin squatted down and began collecting the stuff, drawing it across the border and watching it drift toward a working RRU opening.

"You'd think when people saw somehting like this, they'd do something about it right away," he said, wiping his hands of the dampness of some of the paper "But, no! They just walked on by probably without even reporting the breakdown. It's disgusting."

He looked up at me and saw my smile before I could suppress it.

"What's funny?"

"Nothing, Edwin. Just a difference in attitude. Caused by age, suppose. It's just that I found the litter charming. You have to remember that I was raised in more openly polluted times — before the perfumes, nostrums, and remedies the masks and disguises."

"Yeah. That's gonna be an issue again. Just you wait."

"Good to hear."

We continued on. Edwin, two steps, Carolyn and I. We were now about two blocks from Lise and Bill's apartment building. Two

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

blocks of following Edwin was about all I could take. I wanted to be alone with Carolyn. All this handholding was getting tiresome. I was too old for it. Walking in the rain, hands together, seemed enough romantic nonsense for the time being. My time was short. Who knew when Scott might become aware of Carolyn's absence and, after fumbling around his pockets and checking all the rooms, realized that she must have left? I wanted at least to be alone with her, and at that moment could hardly think beyond that. On the other hand, getting rid of Edwin had already proven to be a formidable task, and Carolyn would be no help. She liked him, or perhaps she preferred to keep him around in order to fend me off. The damnable thing was that she no doubt was satisfied with simply this walk in the cool evening, a few forays into nostalgia, some callow sociology from Edwin, and anything else that would importantly contribute to her commitment to lethargy. I searching her face for an encouraging emotion. Her smile was pleasant, her gaze distant — she even held my hand with a best-buddy sort of indifference.

"Do you have any place around here you'd like to visit?" I said to Edwin.

"What would be worth the trouble?"

"I wish I knew."

We progressed three or four more steps when Edwin said:

"Wait a minute. I've got an idea. You two wait here."

"With pleasure."

As soon as he had disappeared into an arcade up ahead, I pulled at Carolyn's hand and led her into the street.

"He said to wait."

"I know what he said. C'mon."

"This isn't at all fair."

"You're right."

I led her across the street to the center-mall park.

"Why do you keep doing these things to Edwin?" she said as we entered the park. Since we had walked so far from Lise and Bill's building, this was of course a different section of the park. However, you could not easily tell. The benches seemed arranged in the same manner. An actor sitting on one of them strongly resembled the man I'd talked to earlier. If the silence was not golden, it was at least gold-plated.

"What things?" I said.

"Damn it, that's one coy too many. I mean, why are you so insulting to him?"

"You mean, why am I like Scott with him?"

"You bastard!"

She looked like she could hit me. Hooray for me, I could make her angry.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm going back," she said and took a step that way.

"Please, stay. I'm sorry."

"Why should I stay?"

"Because I ask."

"Oh. I should pick up my crinolines and waltz back. Alan, your idea of women dates back at least a century and a half."

"Well — okay, go then."

"Scarlet, I don't give a damn."

She took another step away.

"I won't say anything more about Scott."

"It won't be anything worse than what he says about himself."

I grabbed her arm and tried to pull her to me. But she turned out to be strong; she held her ground. We had what seemed to be a long stand-off — me tugging at her arm, her trying to get away. The actor on the park bench watched, probably to see if we'd do anything he could use later.

Her body relaxed suddenly. I pulled her toward me with some force, so much that I became momentarily off-balance and we both nearly fell. I regained my footing and looked at her. Her need to kill me was clear. I wanted to walk backwards to the other side of the street and start all over. Instead, I kissed her.

It was a bad kiss. God, was it a bad kiss. Off-center, rough, painful, slippery, awkward. Like every other adolescent thing I had done in the course of the evening — the calculated gestures, the sly touching, the handholding, the methodological nostalgia. This could have been a genuine romantic moment, if we both had been sixteen and wide-eyed. If I had seen myself as a fumbling idiot instead of a slick strategist. If I had seen Carolyn as a woman and not a studio portrait.

I tried to hold her for a while afterwards, but she struggled out of my grasp. She half turned away from me, and took a tissue from her pocket, wiped her mouth.

"Well," she said, "that was dumb."

"Thanks, anyway, but I never ask for ratings."

"God damn it, will you stop that?"

"What?"

"Your neatly timed remarks for times like this. No wonder I always felt uneasy around you."

"Uneasy? Really?"

I didn't know whether I was disturbed or proud.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'll shut up. Let's go, for God's sake."

"No. Tell me. About uneasy. We have to keep entertaining the man on the bench anyway."

"Stop it! Jesus, stop it! That is exactly what I mean."

"All right. I'll do what — all right. Tell me what you meant."

The actor, whom I thought I had discouraged by referring to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him aloud, leaned forward.

"It's hard — hard to say. You — you're a spoiler. Or you're like a spoiler, what I think of as a spoiler. You ruin things."

"How?"

"I — no, forget it."

"You started this. You do it."

The actor may have liked the line, since he nodded his head and seemed ready to applaud.

"What you do is, you take the importance out of things. You've always done it, long as I can remember. You talk about things and they're suddenly diminished. Even a trivial event like this —"

"Trivial event! I know it was sloppy, but this is what you call a trivial event?"

"I have to think of it that way."

"That way — why — what way?"

"Oh, I don't know. I don't — maybe it's something about the way you go about things that makes them trivial. The context you put them into, if that means anything."

"But I just don't understand. How am I, like you say, a spoiler?"

"I really can't explain. It's just that there're certain people who come along and shove pins into little balloons. Or something like that. They have to, I don't know, put things in perspective — and sometimes, like you, in a perfectly innocent, intellectually endorsed way. You do that. With me, with Edwin, Scott, Bill and Lise, everybody. We don't play right in whatever your fantasy is, or the important things you look for — then you have to slice up our things in as many ways as you can, and you can toss them at our feet, and we can mourn the pieces."

The actor took out a notebook and wrote something down. Later, I would come back to this spot, look for the actor to ask him what he had written, and find that another actor had taken his place.

"But — God, I suppose you might have — but I have to say these things, it's —"

"You probably do have to. And I wish I could be appreciative, or whatever's needed. Alan, I wanted to sneak off with you tonight. I tried to put you off in a way, but at the same time I wanted to come with you. I needed to come out with you. Or someone. I wanted you to say something nice to me, or say that you loved me or —"

"I love you."

"— or something foolish, just something that would not put me in any strain. An interlude, maybe. Maybe I was ready for an interlude with you. I really liked seeing you again, and I remember a lot of things about us, and I wouldn't mind making love with you, and on top of that I realize that what I'm saying is what you wanted to hear and that it's too late and all wrong.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Whatever it was I wanted, whatever it was you wanted, it's spoiled now."

"Maybe not."

"Anything is maybe not. But, look, you had your romantic whatever, and I had mine, and neither one was worth a shit. We could have worked out some nice realistic lay somewhere, and that might have been good."

"We can still —"

"I don't think so. Get through your head that we are not star-crossed, Alan, and never have been. If anything, our stars crossed at oblique angle, and that's that."

"You do it, too. Trivialize, I mean."

"Probably. Probably it's the way we break up our lives into fragments, coming out of hibernation and seeing the world anew — or not anew — that leads us to small remarks and trivial events. Isn't it odd that we — you and Bill and Lise and Scott and me — all have infinite possibilities in the way we could apportion out our span of years, and yet here we are at this particular time all at about the same age, as if we had all gone into freeze as a team. What are the odds on something like that?"

"Pretty long, I expect."

"Yet perhaps not so long as we might think. You can bet on any one of us, bet that we'll be jumping back into the freezer before we've stayed out long enough to see an outcome. You don't try at all, Bill makes contracts for roles he doesn't intend to play, Lise pretends she's going to cut loose this time around — Scott, even Scott, plays the game. He says he likes to start businesses and get them going, but doesn't care about them once they've leveled off okay. But I hate it when he starts a business, because I know that only about a month will pass before he'll *start* his campaign of suggesting it's time we considered heading back toward the cryonics center again. He will —"

"And you, Carolyn? What about you? Why do you keep at it?"

"Who knows?"

"There must be something something inside you —"

"Inside dried up long ago. Inside I'm a ... prune, an apricot —" She started to laugh and performed an actorish gesture with her hands. The actor took note. "A Melted Creamsicle!"

"Jesus, who's doing remarks now? Or silly jokes, anyway."

"I'm sorry, I just want to avoid any more of this."

"You like to avoid, don't you?"

"Look, let's just stop here, huh? Anything you want, I'll take everything back, I'll forgive you, I'll let you forgive me, anything, but let's just get the hell out of here, I —"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Wait. In a minute. Just tell me—"

"Please stop grilling me. Don't grill me. I have a shrink for that."

"Look, excuse my dumb way of putting it, but I came out of freeze yesterday and the cold wouldn't leave me. Then, when I saw you again and hoped, hoped I don't know for what, your coldness only made all of my—"

"Stop. I don't believe you. This is some kind of finesse. I'm too cold, you're too cold, let's thaw, baby. At least don't treat me like a character in *your* type of story, Alan. I don't jump around levels."

"Well, what—"

"I will not warm up to the subject." She laughed, then said again in a softer voice: "I will not warm up to the subject."

I accepted it as a private joke, and laughed with her. I even found it a little funny.

"Oh, shit!" Carolyn said, somewhere in the middle of laughing.

"It's not so bad, even if we are chuckling like madmen."

"That's not what I was saying shit about."

"What, then?"

"It's Edwin."

"What about Edwin?"

"He's found us."

"Oh, shit."

I put one arm around Carolyn's shoulders, and she did not resist, perhaps because the return of Edwin reinstated the earlier mood. We walked toward him. He came up to us already smiling and ready to be invited in on the joke. Instead, I rested my other arm on his shoulder and led us out of the park. He tried to form some questions, but I got in first:

"Where'd you run off to?"

"Oh, just a place."

"What place?"

"A place over there. It's not important."

"It's important because I want to know. Tell me."

"Well, it's kind of embarrassing. Just a whim. A stupid idea, really. I'd rather forget it."

"No privileges. Tell."

He seemed actually to blush. He fidgeted while he explained.

"Well, what it is, I just ran into the arcade there because I remembered something we talked about and, well, thought I'd do something about it. You see, it's not so good looking at it from down here, the real hick thing to do is to go to the roof and take a 'copter to it...."

"To what? What are you talking about?"

"The Mars Ship. I was going to buy you two tickets to the Mars Ship. It's the romantic thing to do, and I thought it would be, would be okay. So I was going to buy the tickets for a surprise, but they're all sold out for the next couple of hours."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"They have a ticket office *here*?"

"Where else?"

"Remember, I'm the dummy — explain. What and where is the Mars Ship?"

"You don't know. I guessed that you didn't. You've been out here all this time and you've never looked up."

"Why should I look up?" I said, stubbornly refusing to look up even at that moment. I sensed Carolyn looking skyward and her subsequent sharp intake of breath.

"Because thats where it is. Up there."

He pointed, and I looked. And I saw the Mars Ship.

It was hanging there in the sky, just above the highest building, seemingly floating over the wide street. At that moment a helicopter was approaching it. Lights on top of buildings were focused upon it, and I suddenly realized why it had seemed so bright for this hour of night. The extra illumination had confused my sense of time.

I cannot really explain my reaction to the sight of the Mars Ship. I had trouble communicating it to Edwin at the time, and even in retrospect I find myself thinking of the wrong words. I mean, take any monument or massive man-made structure and try to describe it to someone who does not know it, who hasn't even seen a picture of it. The Statue of Liberty — "A rather prim-looking matron in a robe holding up a torch." The Eiffel Tower — "Well, sort of like a light tower, but without the wires attached, and much, much bigger." Big Ben — "A large clock."

That's the way it was with the Mars Ship. Anyone who has seen it or a picture of it needs few supporting details; anyone who hasn't is better served with a picture of it or a trip to the site. For me, the first sighting of the Mars Ship was something of a shock. For me, the thought that came to me was that it was awesome. And not only because of its size, which was impressive. Dodecagonal in shape, it was colored a deep gold which was made more luminous by the bright lights directed at it. In the center was a glassed hemisphere, a rainbow-colored (the lights again) cockpit in which some of the machinery that ran the ship could be seen. People could be occasionally glimpsed from the edges of walkways, presumably looking down at the street — at us looking at them. Arranged in two circles close to the edge of the ship were rows of insignia representing all the countries of the world. Curved white stripes ran from the isignia to the border of the cockpit. We could not, of course, see the huge observation tower on the upper side wherein all the technological para

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

phernalia and living and leisure accommodations of the astronauts were on display to groups of tourists.

In fact, many of the famous details did not register with me at that moment. Perhaps all I saw was that the Mars Ship was as large as a good-sized building, and it was hovering above us.

"A pretty silly sight, eh?" Edwin said. "A suitable monument to mankind's folly.

"What do you mean by that, Edwin?"

His voice, as he told me, provided clues that none of it should have to be explained.

"I mean that it's just like mankind to endow a real tragedy with overindulgent sentimental humor, by providing lengthy testimonials and *monuments*. Hanging the goddamned Mars Ship over the streets of the city, for example. And, believe me, this burg had to do some dirty infighting to get the right to keep it."

"Wait a second. I want to get one thing straight. I understood that the Mars Ship exploded somewhere on the return trip —"

"I told you that," Carolyn said.

"Yes," said Edwin.

Pause.

"Well, if it exploded in space, how did it manifest itself up there? Through some kind of spiritual means?"

"Oh, right, I see. I forget what people know and don't know. No, this is a *replica* —" He was pronouncing words carefully now, explaining to a child. "It was planned and constructed by a Yugoslavian artist who wanted to commemorate the event."

I looked up at the Mars Ship again.

"And what keeps it up there?"

"There're guy wires leading to the buildings. You can just barely see them in the daytime and —"

"Now wait. I'm no physicist or anything, but how the hell can a few guy wires hold up something like that? It would need billions, and it still wouldn't float evenly in the breeze like that."

"I don't get you."

"The weight, Edwin. The weight of all that metal."

His chuckle had a good deal of embarrassment in it.

"Right, I see. No, this is not an exact textural reproduction. It's done to scale, and that is exactly what it looked like, except for the transparent bubble there, which is purely a tourist thing. The real machinery was enclosed properly in metal. However, this replica is not heavy metal and materials, as the ship was. It's a combination of extremely lightweight substances — metals and plastics — lighter than cloth, yet firm enough to walk on. Outside and inside, everything

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reproduced to scale. All the instruments of the original ship are duplicated there, the rooms, the working controls and computers, that sort of thing. Plaques all the hell over the thing have on them minute descriptions of the ship and the crew and the whole mission itself."

The helicopter had landed on the Mars Ship, graphic proof of Edwin's description.

"The whole thing is safe as could be," he continued. "If you cut all the guy wires, which is impossible to get away with anyway, there's a fail-safe mechanism for the fall, slowing the ship down so that it would land like a marshmallow. If it did fall, it wouldn't injure a soul. The ship might even float away instead of falling."

"You sound like a tour guide."

"I've taken the tour a few times."

"But you think it's all silly sentiment."

"Well, I've studied it."

"And do they take people to it in those helicopters?" Carolyn asked.

"That's right. Costs a pretty penny, but it's the main attraction these days."

"I can see why."

"Well, there is a certain attractive vulgarity about it."

"No, not vulgarity, Edwin," I said.

"What then?"

"Beauty."

"Are you kidding?"

"It's a bleedin' testament to man done the way man does best."

"You're kidding."

"I don't know how to explain it to you. Man, it's the pyramids, the Colossus of Rhodes —"

I knew I was probably exaggerating, but I was searching for the way I felt.

"How can you say that?" Edwin said. "It's garish, it's a commercial ploy that cheapens the event it is supposed to honor. It represents the second-rate achievement of technological man."

"The pyramids were built by slaves. The Colossus was probably a piece of commercial hackwork ordered by an emperor who had his thumb on the neck of some sculptor. Artists work for that kind of reason, to influence a powerful monarch, to please a disease-ridden pope."

"And you're calling that — *that* — Art?"

"I don't know what I'm calling it, Edwin. Just shut up. For the eighty-eighth time, shut up."

We stood and gazed at the Mars Ship for perhaps a half an hour. I saw the helicopters carry six or seven loads of people to and from the ship. Nothing about the ship itself changed in all that time, but I could not stop looking at it. It

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was awesome, it was exciting, it was golden, it was beautiful.

When I finally looked away from the ship and at Carolyn, I found her watching me, and smiling. She was quite pretty.

"Come away with me," I said.

At first she did not comprehend. Then she laughed — a wild, happy laugh.

"Under the —" she started to say, but had to find more control in order to finish the sentence. Edwin, puzzled, chuckled anyway.

"Beneath the underbelly of the Mars Ship," she finally said, "all things are possible. Is that it?"

"No. Come away with me."

She obviously wanted to be serious, but could not stop laughing.

"You're not — you cannot be cured. You know that? Your attitudes, your poses, your fantasies — they are not salvageable even. That's it, isn't it?"

"No. Come away with me."

I thought I heard Edwin whispering, okay, I will.

"Give me reasons why I should," Carolyn said.

"No. Come away with me."

"Tonight?"

I nodded.

"But I — well, maybe."

I turned to Edwin.

"And you were saying, Edwin?"

He was a bit taken aback.

"About what?"

"Mankind's folly up there."

He seemed both pleased and confused.

"Nothing much more, really. A lot of crap, really. What the people in my circle say. They find it ironic that the one major attraction of our time is an exact reproduction of a massive piece of hardware that failed."

"Well, they may have something there. But I think it's beautiful."

Edwin nodded, pleased to be discovered as a closet vulgarian.

"Come on," I said to Carolyn.

"Where are we going?"

"You'll see."

We walked slowly back the way we had come. For most of the journey we did not say anything to each other. As we neared Bill and Lise's building, I leaned over and whispered to Carolyn:

"Time for a decision."

"I'm not ready."

"Oh. Okay."

At the elevator Edwin said he would be traveling on instead of returning to the party.

"Nope," I said.

"What?"

"You're coming up with us. I want you to."

"Really? Well ... well, I guess I'll just go on up with you."

I knew as we all entered the elevator that a long ordeal awaited us. It was as if I had a sudden vision

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of Bill in the hallway trying to coax me back into the elevator, alone; and Lise drunkenly laughing while trying to hold herself up against a wall; and Scott refusing to deal with me, taking wild swings at my head, connecting, making me dizzy and leaving my face bruised for days; and Carolyn getting angry, and telling Scott to fold up, and saying that she emphatically did not know what she wanted but she emphatically intended to take a chance this time and that meant she would try living with me for a while (Which she did. But it didn't work out. But that was all right.); and me saying that I was damn well offering a possibility that might damn well work; and Bill struggling with a lecture of the ethics of the matter; and Lise shouting that Bill was only mad because the fight was spoiling his party, then turning to Carolyn and telling her to go to it; and Edwin choosing to applaud at a perfectly timed moment, then looking around to see what had been wrong with his timing; and Scott folding up into about two-thirds of his former self and sobbing; and Carolyn taking the hand I offered her as we retreated back to the elevator. As the vision came to me, I had a momentary impulse to ask the speaker for the wrong floor, but then I spoke the directions loud and clear.

Not only the next couple hours but the next few days would be difficult, more painful than I could have imagined. Yet I didn't care, and I don't care. Not as long as I'd stolen Carolyn and I'd seen the Mars Ship.

COLLECTOR'S ITEM
AUTOGRAPHED SPECIAL SILVERBERG ISSUE

Our April 1974 issue honored Robert Silverberg and featured "Born With The Dead," a highly acclaimed and award-winning novella.

Less than 200 of these issues have been signed by Mr. Silverberg, and we offer then while they last for $3.00 each, which includes postage, envelope and handling.

The special issue also features a profile of Silverberg by Barry N. Malzberg, an article, "Robert Silverberg, The Compleat Writer," by Thomas Clareson, a Silverberg bibliography by Donald Tuck and a special cover by Ed Emsh.

MERCURY PRESS, INC. P.O. Box 56, Cornwall, Ct. 96753

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"All right, all right! Stop it!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kit Reed, who wrote "The Attack of the Giant Baby," January 1976, returns with a strange and compelling extrapolation of things that remain the same ...

The Holdouts

by KIT REED

Seen from a distance, it would have looked like something out of the funny papers: a small overgrown island somewhere in the Pacific; wild trees encircling a place which was more nest than clearing, with a Japanese private standing guard over a dugout thatched in palm; he would be holding a rifle so rusty as to have no remaining moving parts, ready to defend his commanding officer and the adjutant who sat inside in tattered uniforms, incessantly moving markers across a packing crate in a game of GO. There would be signs of an enduring domesticity: vestigial uniforms freshly washed and hanging on a vine, marks in the bamboo uprights — hundreds of small nicks, the GO scores up to the point when the players tired of recording them; more than two dozen large nicks, marking off too many years. Their conversation would be almost visible: weary Japanese characters in ragged talk balloons, and over the private's head a vision of acres of complaisant bellies and embracing thighs. Of course they could not see themselves from a distance; they had lived so close for so many years that they could hardly see each other; and offered the opportunity to see themselves from a distance, they would have refused because that would make it too hard for them to carry on; and this had been their duty: to fight when engaged and remain at this point until relieved; so far neither had happened and so they continued to carry on.

The worst part of all was the waiting.

In the beginning there had been plenty to do: enemy on all sides, blood filling the air in a misty spray, warlike din, cries of the wounded and shouts of banzai; but when it was over and the captain

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the lieutenant emerged to view the incredible carnage, there was an uncanny silence in the jungle; it was as if all other human life had ceased that day; and when they dragged themselves back to headquarters, they found that, with a private named Kimu, whom they dragged out of the ruined hut, they were the only members of the Imperial Army left alive.

There was sure to be a second wave, and so they had salvaged what they could and retreated to the jungle to prepare. When the enemy came they would be hopelessly outnumbered, but they would take as many with them as they could, dying gloriously and so winning after all, because this glorious death would fulfill all their lifetime aspirations.

Perhaps they would not die but would emerge victorious to greet the landing forces. The marks of their suffering would be an inspiration to all.

Or the emperor, marking the glorious victory which would come in time, would make a tour of these islands. He would commend them for their fidelity, admiring the military neatness of the encampment and the scale of discipline they had managed to maintain.

If they had to, they would spend their lives on a Marine straggler or a single guerrilla, so achieving a soldier's most honorable aim.

In the meantime, they were beginning to get on each other's nerves. In the first months, or years, the main business had been survival, because they had received no more supplies. Yoshi, the lieutenant, would direct Private Kimu on foraging expeditions while Captain Shigamitsu worked over reports and thought up face-saving duties for himself because he was so excellent at delegating authority that he had left himself with nothing to do. Yoshi was ambitious, and although he could not expect advancement so long as there were only three of them, he looked at Shigamitsu in obvious speculation, wondering just how long it would be before a venomous insect or a jungle disease carried their captain away. Kimu was lonely and entertained fantasies in which he and the others would become comrades instead of commanders - and - subordinate. When it seemed safe enough they could build a fire and sit around a roasting pig, exchanging reminiscences of student days in the mother country, the snows on Mount Fuji, chimes tinkling like crystal in isolated shrines. He would tell them about Benji, the bride he had known for only two weeks before the war swept him up and carried him away, and they in turn would tell about their wives or women; they could build story on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

story and so make all the absences tolerable. But Yoshi would rebuff him and Shigamitsu was forever the commander, preoccupied and remote. When he was off duty Kimu could not hope to fraternize, and so he would take his loneliness to some safe spot where he could lie on his back and look through the branches at his hopes, so absorbed that he barely noticed the changing aircraft which moved faster and faster, lacing the sky. Back in camp, the lieutenant continually tried to better himself; Capt. Shigamitsu secretly thought that Yoshi talked too much.

As the years passed they grew more and more adept at hunting iguanas and harvesting the fruit which presented itself in unlikely guises in the greenery. Capt. Shigamitsu had, early on, relieved the private of the duty of preparing the food. Now, in the interest of art, he spent hours over each meal, while Lieut. Yoshi stitched new shoes for them out of vines and bark, and Pvt. Kimu alternately stood guard and policed the area, burying rubbish and scraps because the captain still firmly believed that it was only a matter of time before the enemy arrived and they had to withdraw to a better vantage point without leaving a trace. They would ambush the enemy and fall on them like ravening beasts, killing in an orgy of fulfillment which would redeem all these years. Secretly, each admitted to himself that it was not such a bad existence. They had lived so long with waiting that now waiting was their life.

Every night of their lives Minnie had to go into the projection booth and run the unfinished *White Goddess* for the aging Alta McKay. Gorgeous in crushed velvet, the star would coil on her brocaded sofa, crying out each time she saw the plane crash in the jungle, weeping with relief when, as the golden-haired aviatrix, she emerged from the wreckage to rule over all those wonder-struck savages. Still, she never could be happy because, just as the jealous witch doctor approached her with his knife, the picture would flicker and give way to blank leader, and she would bite her knuckles in frustration because this would have been her greatest picture, a monument to her love for LaMont Raburn, who, as Captain Gallant, had wooed her onscreen and off.

If she didn't get some money soon, she was never going to finish *White Goddess*. Of course she would have to replace LaMont; he was in real estate in Encino now; he had a string of franchise chicken houses; and although she seldom saw him, she knew he had a paunch, the smooth skin and patient air of a man who has grown

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

too old too soon. It was not, after all, LaMont but the *idea* of LaMont she had to be faithful to, and at the back of her mind flickered a picture of his replacement: tall and handsome and young. She herself would avoid close-ups, doing her takes through gauze or a protective screen of leaves. She would invite LaMont to the premiere and rekindle the fires of their love, taking up life at the point at which it had been so cruelly broken off. It was like having a child half born; once it was done, she could relax; she might even marry LaMont; they could grow fat off his fried chicken, and she could let her face and her waistline go; she would at last be able to let herself grow old. But her prospects were poor, and it was bitter, bitter to see the story broken off at this same point every night and not know when she could hope to finish it.

For Minnie it was even more bitter. If she had not been pregnant with Minnie, Alta McKay might have been able to finish *White Goddess* before the Crash, and she forever blamed Minnie for that first failure, which had marked the turning of the tide. Despised, Minnie put on pallid dresses and languished at the windows of that Spanish stucco heap, destined to stay with Alta McKay until she was released by marriage or unexpected riches, both possibilities which grew fainter with every passing year.

Some time in their twentieth year on the island Kimu had made a flag of an old tarpaulin and hoisted it on a palm tree on the far side, where the others could not see it; if the enemy was going to find them, he hoped it would be soon because the others were officers and could talk among themselves, but he was about to die of loneliness.

He was, through no effort of his own, more or less a recluse: Ethan Frome after the sled crashed, although he would not have known the allusion. He lived in an isolated farm house with his ailing wife, Sarah, and Essie, her ailing sister, and he had to take long walks to escape their voices, which filled the house and twined about his bones. He would walk the fences for hours and then come back to spend more time than he needed to fooling with the livestock in the barn. The winters had always been the worst; he had to be indoors more, and the windows would have to be sealed tight, enclosing the women's voices so that they seemed to be talking even when they weren't talking; he would have to clamp his hands over his ears and pray for spring, comforting himself with the thought that perhaps this spring he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would be able to sell the farm, he could set his women up in a rest home and go to some place where it was always quiet. Before he could sell it, he would have to bring it up, and he didn't have the money to bring it up; he knew, further, that if he did have the money it would mean taking on some help and the help would want to talk to him the whole time he was in the fields, even as the women talked to him the whole time he was in the house, and he would never have any peace. He had managed to get along so far, feeding on the silence of the night, fleeing the women's voices in the fields, but this spring was filled with new menace: although she never did a lick of work around the house, his sister-in-law Essie was improved. She liked to go for little walks now, coming up behind him unexpectedly in the barn, following him on his retreat to the fields. When he was too sorely pressed he would have to climb to the top of the last bales of hay in the loft and fall to brooding; if he had a buyer he would sell this place and put his women away and then buy a farm on the side of a mountain, where he could till the rocks in perfect solitude.

When a bystander stepped forward and said to Japheth, "You must be out of your mind," he said, "You may be right," and he and the others went on building the Ark as they had been told.

During one very bad period, partly to pass the time and partly to take their minds off their penetrating hunger, Shigamitsu had his men tell their life stories.

"I was at the head of my class," said Yoshi, although it was not precisely true. They had finished the captain's mango stew and the next-to-last tin of meat. The other one remained in the supplies cache underneath a pile of rocks and protective palm fronds, and although it was nowhere in sight, it preyed on Yoshi's mind. "I was to go to the university to become an engineer. Then the war came and I can only hope that they will permit me to study for the university once again." He brightened. "Perhaps they will admit me without examinations, because of my great service to the Imperial Army of Japan."

"Perhaps there is no more university," said Capt. Shigamitsu, who had secret misgivings; if all were well at home, why was the war still going on? He saw Yoshi's face blurring with anxiety, and he went on quickly, "I mean, not as we know it. There will be more scientific methods, we will learn by injection or by listening in our sleep."

"When I am an engineer," said

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yoshi, "I shall have three houses." He was still thinking about the tin of meat. It was the last, and he couldn't stop thinking about it. "I shall sleep in one, I shall have all my women in another and love some and commit sins among the others whenever I care to, and in my third house ..." His eyes glazed momentarily. "In the third I shall eat and eat and eat." If they opened the tin and ate it now, it would be all over with and he wouldn't have to go on thinking about it. But the captain would insist that they save it for another day.

"Not I," said Kimu, surprised at his own audacity. "I shall go back to Benji in our one house, and we shall sleep and eat and breathe together, joined as one."

"Bless you," the captain said. He would have liked to know Kimu better, but with the situation as it was, this was impossible; he was the commanding officer, he understood Yoshi's ambitions and knew that his subordinates must be kept at the appropriate levels; at all costs, discipline would be maintained. Perhaps when they were all civilians together, in some future as yet unconceived ....

"I shall design a new bridge, it will go all the way across Yokohama Bay." Yoshi looked at the others, thinking secretly: And you shall have to pay to go on it.

"There is nothing much to tell," said the captain, when it came his turn to attempt his life story. Indeed, there was not. His life had been so undistinguished before and they had been here for so long that it was hard for him to remember what had gone on. He offered: "I remember, I was very happy as a child." He wished now only for certain of his scrolls, for the collection of sharp knives he liked to use in cooking, for the variety of vegetables he would have found in the markets at home.

"Of course when we go home we will be heroes," Yoshi said.

They slept well that night despite their hunger; rather, two of them did. Yoshi was kept awake by the hunger which griped at his stomach, and although he tried every way he knew to deal with it, he understood finally that he was going to have to dig out that last tin of meat and get it over with for once and all.

He would have killed the captain to spare himself the shame, but there was no way; one minute he was crouched, bolting down the meat too fast to taste it, and in the next he looked up to find Shigamitsu standing over him with a look of great saddness, offering his sword. Although humiliation overcame him, Yoshi could not stop himself from licking the last fragment of meat off the raw edge

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the tin, and then he stood, knowing at once that his commanding officer was offering him the only honorable way out; he was to save face by using the ceremonial sword. The captain held out the sword for several seconds before Yoshi took it; then he turned with great gravity and left Yoshi along.

But Yoshi could not do it. When dawn came Captain Shigamitsu would return to find him still sitting, contemplating the sword, and with a great sigh of sadness he would take it from him, so removing the immediate command to do what was expected. Yoshi slunk off and was gone for three days. When he returned, the captain was happy enough to have someone to share his cooking, because, pleasant as he was, the private had no appreciation of the subtler possibilities of taste, and for all his good will he had never been able to play a decent game of GO. By that time the private had killed a rather large iguana and, for the time being, they were able to set their difficulties aside; it was tacitly agreed that they would forget Yoshi's disgrace.

The effort of keeping her face muscles taut and her bosom at a certain elevation had begun to tell on Alta McKay. She ran the film twice a day now, rushing from screen to dressing room mirror with an urgency that troubled her, and when Minnie would try to follow, she would turn on her, snapping: "Why don't you go out for a change? Why don't you ever have any friends?"

There was no answer Minnie could give. She had grown so accustomed to life in the house that she could not get along outside it; if she ate anywhere else, she was acutely conscious of people watching her chew each bite, waiting for her to swallow, and so her mouth would dry out and the food would lodge there, sometimes she thought forever; if she tried to talk to somebody outside the house, her head would bob and her hands tremble beyond her control, her voice would fail and her throat tighten in an orgy of self-consciousness; so she chose to stay in the house until the day when Alta, maddened by her daughter's failings, jammed a twenty dollar bill into her purse and pushed her out the door, saying, "I want you to go downtown and don't come back until you've had some fun."

Minnie gasped and unfocused her eyes, waggling her hands against the brightness of the sun. Given her choice, she would have gone back inside at once, but she was conscious of Alta in the Moorish tile archway, watching to be sure she did not falter.

Minnie took the bus that ran by the end of the long drive and spent

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the rest of the day in cheap department stores, buying a lipstick and a bright print dress and a pair of sandals, all from counters holding distressed merchandise. Then, tremulous with haste, she ducked into a ladies' room and put them on, impulsively stuffing her old clothes into the paper towel bin. When she went out she was conscious of a change in herself and the way people looked at her; she squared her shoulders and for once found it easy to smile, mingling with crowds so dense that they dizzied her. She had gone no more than a block when she grew faint, welcoming the gathering darkness with the lunatic thought that she would be perfectly happy if she could die here and never go back, knowing instinctively that it would never work that way for her.

She could not know that despite her age she looked young and vulnerable, limply pretty, sagging against a revolving door. She fell into a faint and woke to find herself supported by an extremely nice-looking man about her age.

"I'm so sorry," she said.

"Nonsense, I'm happy to help." He was looking into her face as if hypnotized. "Funny, you look just like someone I know."

"Oh, look," she said, "the door has dirtied your coat, and it's all my fault."

"My pleasure."

"Let me pay to have it cleaned."

"Oh, don't worry about that," he said, "I've come into a bit of money recently. May I take you home?"

"Oh, yes, thank you," said Minnie. He was not handsome but he was *nice*; he was old enough for it to be sensible for her to fall in love with him, and, what's more, he seemed drawn to her, holding her gently by one elbow and bending as if to protect her from whatever came.

"Yes," he said, although she would not have brought it up again, "I've come into a little money. As a matter of fact, I'm looking for someplace to invest. Who *is* it you remind me of?" He was staring fixedly into her face.

"Perhaps you've heard of my mother," she said and told him, just as they came up the drive.

"Of course, I've seen all her movies." His eyes were shining. "But you're even prettier."

"She'll be very happy to meet you," Minnie said. She could see Alta McKay stirring just beyond the beads which covered the glass arches in the door.

"Damn fool music, damn fool kids, why would I want to do a thing like that?"

"They'll pay you a fortune," the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

real-estate broker said.

And so he had a chance to sell his farm to a rock-festival promoter. He had two weeks in which to think it over, two weeks to break the news to his womenfolk and make arrangements for them at the nursing home; then he could cut out like a bird set free; he would never have to listen to either of them again. He held his secret, coddling it in his bosom, feeding on it in an orgy of silence, aware that once he made the deal and set the machinery in process, it would be irrevocable, and he would have to do a lot of talking before he finally got shut of it all.

Despite all of Alta McKay's anxiety and her insistence on showing *White Goddess* each time he came, her daughter's romance flowered, with this quiet, self-effacing rich man presenting himself at the mansion each night, proposing at last in the stillness of each early morning, accepting Minnie's explanation that she could not leave the house until *White Goddess* was finished and she was free; he may not have understood that Minnie was, as well, frightened at the prospect of leaving this house where she had been safe for so long.

So it happened that he came in one night with a lawyer and a plan; they would finish *White Goddess*, fulfilling all their hopes and leaving them free to begin again; he put it to them both, to Minnie, who was loving but uncertain, to Alta, who may have known that she would at last be forced to look at the screen and see her own true and present face, that even with the movie finished, parts of it would never please her, it could never measure up to the picture she had in her mind any more than LaMont could match her memories; he probably never loved her anyway, nor could she be sure she would love LaMont ....

"It's an offer," he said. Essie had followed him to the barn. "They want me to sell the farm."

"You can't do that," she said and, abruptly, twined her arms around him as surely as if she had been thinking about it for months. Her arms were warm but frail; he could still step away.

Even if they had wanted it, they could never have been delivered from the ark because, as much as they railed against the closeness and the smell, they would have ridden on dutifully, for with each choice the options grow more limited, no matter what people pretend, and by that time in their passage, deliverance was not one of the patterns; besides, it was going to take all the guts they had just to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

get off when they were supposed to, after the rain stopped and the mountain emerged.

Although planes and carriers and escort ships were circling an area some hundred miles south of there, the space capsule splashed down in the waters just off their island, and after an intolerable wait, the astronaut emerged and swam to shore, stripped of his space suit but impressive in the white overall with his name and the American flag stitched to the left breast.

As he came out of the water, the Japanese backed into fighting formation, crouching and begging him to fight.

"Oh my God," the astronaut said, taking in the stick figures with rusted weapons, the tattered uniforms.

Somebody said, "Banzai."

But he only said, "Oh, you poor sons of bitches," and tried to explain. "... and we have television now," he finished, "and I just got back from the moon."

They shook their heads, still menacing.

"You don't understand," he said. "You're saved."

But they did; Shigamitsu was, in the end, happy enough on the island; he had often thought he would not care to go back to a homeland filled with uncertainties and surprises, any more than Yoshi would want to return in disgrace; Kimu was thinking, in panic, I am so old and thin now, she will not recognize me; they were all caught up in a vertiginous view of the future; if they were not careful, it would snatch them up and sweep them away.

"... do you understand?"

Shigamitsu had English, and so he had received the message a little faster than the others and had been able to consider for a moment before he passed it on, but there turned out to be no need for consultation; the others understood as well as he, and their wills were already forming, as a pearl will form itself around a grain of sand, enclosing their safe, vestigial lives; without a word they all three raised their rifles with the rusty bayonets, converging from different points as if in the heat of their rush they might meet to form a star; and as one they drove their bayonets into the enemy, whose eyes widened in profound surprise as he coughed and died.

"A Yankee trick," said Yoshi, because they had to say something.

"Yes," said Captain Shigamitsu, and they resumed their game of GO.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lisa Tuttle's new story is the suspenseful account of a mystery-writing couple who move to a country home and find that they have inherited a haunted stable.

The Horse Lord

by LISA TUTTLE

The double barn doors were secured by a length of stout, rust-encrusted chain, fastened with an old padlock.

Marilyn hefted the lock with one hand and tugged at the chain, which did not give. She looked up at the splintering grey wood of the doors and wondered how the children had gotten in.

Dusting red powder from her hands, Marilyn strolled around the side of the old barn. Dead leaves and dying grasses crunched beneath her sneakered feet, and she hunched her shoulders against the chill in the wind.

"There's plenty of room for horses," Kelly had said the night before at dinner. "There's a perfect barn. You can't say it would be impractical to keep a horse here." Kelly was Derek's daughter, eleven years old and mad for horses.

This barn had been used as a stable, Marilyn thought, and could be again. Why not get Kelly a horse? And why not one for herself as well? As a girl, Marilyn had ridden in Central Park. She stared down the length of the barn: for some reason, the door to each stall had been tightly boarded shut.

Marilyn realized she was shivering, then, and she finished her circuit of the barn at a trot and jogged all the way back to the house.

The house was large and solid, built of grey stone 170 years before. It seemed a mistake, a misplaced object in this cold, empty land. Who would choose to settle here, who would try to eke out a living from the ungiving, stony soil?

The old house and the eerily empty countryside formed a setting very much like one Marilyn, who wrote suspense novels, had once created for a story. She liked the reality much less than her heroine had liked the fiction.

The big kitchen was warm and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

felt comforting after the outside air. Marilyn leaned against the sink to catch her breath and let herself relax. But she felt tense. The house seemed unnaturally quiet with all the children away at school. Marilyn smiled wryly at herself. A week before, the children had been driving her crazy with their constant noise and demands, and now that they were safely away at school for nine hours every day she felt uncomfortable.

From one extreme to the other, thought Marilyn. The story of my life.

Only a year ago she and Derek, still newly married, were making comfortable plans to have a child — perhaps two — "someday."

Then Joan — Derek's ex-wife — had decided she'd had her fill of mothering, and almost before Marilyn had time to think about it, she'd found herself with a half-grown daughter.

And following quickly on that event — while Marilyn and Kelly were still wary of each other — Derek's widowed sister had died, leaving her four children in Derek's care.

Five children! Perhaps they wouldn't have seemed like such a herd if they had come in typical fashion, one at a time with a proper interval between.

It was the children, too, who had made living in New York City seem impossible. This house had been in Derek's family since it was built, but no one had lived in it for years. It had been used from time to time as a vacation home, but the land had nothing to recommend it to vacationers: no lakes or mountains, and the weather was usually unpleasant. It was inhospitable country, a neglected corner of New York state.

It should have been a perfect place for writing — their friends all said so. An old house, walls soaked in history, set in a brooding, rocky landscape, beneath an unlittered sky, far from the distractions and noise of the city. But Derek could write anywhere — he carried his own atmosphere with him, a part of his ingrained discipline — and Marilyn needed the bars, restaurants, museums, shops and libraries of a large city to fill in the hours when words could not be commanded.

The silence was suddenly too much to bear. Derek wasn't typing — he might be wanting conversation. Marilyn walked down the long dark hallway — thinking to herself that this house needed more light fixtures, as well as pictures on the walls and rugs on the cold wooden floors.

Derek was sitting behind the big parson's table that was his desk, cleaning one of his sixty-seven pipes. The worn but richly pattern-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ed rug on the floor, the glow of lamplight and the books which lined the walls made this room, the library and Derek's office, seem warmer and more comfortable than the rest of the house.

"Talk?" said Marilyn, standing with her hand on the doorknob.

"Sure, come on in. I was just stuck on how to get the chief slave into bed with the mistress of the plantation without making her yet another cliched nymphomaniac."

"Have him comfort her in time of need," Marilyn said. She closed the door on the dark hallway. "He just happens to be on hand when she gets a letter informing her of her dear brother's death. In grief, and as an affirmation of life, she and the slave tumble into bed together."

"Pretty good," Derek said. "You got a problem I can help you with?"

"Not a literary one," she said, crossing the room to his side. Derek put an arm around her. "I was just wondering if we couldn't get a horse for Kelly. I was out to look at the barn. It's all boarded and locked up, but I'm sure we could get in and fix it up. And I don't think it could cost that much to keep a horse or two."

"Or two," he echoed. He cocked his head and gave her a sly look. "You sure you want to start using a barn with a rather grim history?"

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't I ever tell you the story of how my, hmmm, great-uncle, I guess he must have been — my great-uncle Martin, how he died?"

Marilyn shook her head, her expression suspicious.

"It's a pretty gruesome story."

"Derek..."

"It's true, I promise you. Well... remember my first slave novel?"

"How could I forget? It paid for our honeymoon."

"Remember the part where the evil boss-man who tortures his slaves and horses alike is finally killed by a crazed stallion?"

Marilyn grimaced. "Yeah. A bit much, I thought. Horses aren't carnivorous."

"I got the idea for that scene from my great-uncle Martin's death. His horses — and he kept a whole stable — went crazy, apparently. I don't know if they actually *ate* him, but he was pretty chewed up when someone found his body." Derek shifted in his chair. "Martin wasn't known to be a cruel man. He didn't abuse his horses; he loved them. He didn't love Indians, though, and the story was that the stables were built on ground sacred to the Indians, who put a curse on Martin or his horses in retaliation."

Marilyn shook her head. "Some story. When did all this happen?"

"Around 1880."

"And the barn has been board-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ed up ever since?"

"I guess so. I remember the few times Anna and I came out here as kids we could never find a way to get inside. We made up stories about the ghosts of the mad horses still being inside the barn. But because they were ghosts, they couldn't be held by normal walls, and roamed around at night. I can remember nights when we'd huddle together, certain we heard their ghostly neighing..." His eyes looked faraway. Remembering how much he had loved his sister, Marilyn felt guilty about her reluctance to take in Anna's children. After all, they were all Derek had left of his sister.

"So this place *is* haunted," she said, trying to joke. Her voice came out uneasy, however.

"Not the house," said Derek quickly. "Old Uncle Martin died in the barn."

"What about your ancestors who lived here before that? Didn't the Indian curse touch them?"

"Well..."

"Derek," she said warningly.

"OK. Straight dope. The first family, the first bunch of Hoskins who settled here were done in by Indians. The parents and the two bond-servants were slaughtered, and the children were stolen. The house was burned to the ground. That wasn't this house, obviously."

"But it stands on the same ground."

"Not exactly. That house stood on the other side of the barn — though I doubt the present barn stood then — Anna and I used to play around the foundations. I found a knife there once, and she found a little tin box which held ashes and a pewter ring."

"But you never found any ghosts."

Derek looked up at her. "Do ghosts hang around once their house is burned?"

"Maybe."

"No, we never did. Those Hoskins were too far back in time to bother with, maybe. We never saw any Indian ghosts, either."

"Did you ever see the ghost horses?"

"See them?" He looked thoughtful. "I don't remember. We might have. Funny what you can forget about childhood. No matter how important it seems to you as a child..."

"We become different people when we grow up," Marilyn said.

Derek gazed into space a moment, then roused himself to gesture at the wall of books behind him. "If you're interested in the family history, that little set in dark green leather was written by one of my uncles and published by a vanity press. He traces the Hoskins back to Shakespeare's time, if I recall. The longest I ever spent out here until now was one rainy sum-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mer when I was about twelve... it seemed like forever... and I read most of the books in the house, including those."

"I'd like to read them."

"Go ahead." He watched her cross the room and wheel the library ladder into position. "Why, are you thinking of writing a novel about my family?"

"No. I'm just curious to discover what perversity made your ancestor decide to build a house *here*, of all godforsaken places on the continent."

Marilyn thought of Jane Eyre as she settled into the window seat, the heavy green curtains falling back into place to shield her from the room. She glanced out at the chilly grey land and picked up the first volume.

James Hoskins won a parcel of land in upstate New York in a card game. Marilyn imagined his disappointment when he set eyes on his prize, but he was a stubborn man and frequently unlucky at cards. This land might not be much, but it was his own. He brought his family and household goods to a roughly built wooden house. A more permanent house, larger and built of native rock, would be built in time.

But James Hoskins would never see it built. In a letter to relatives in Philadelphia, Hoskins related:

"The land I have won is of great value, at least to a poor, wandering remnant of Indians. Two braves came to the house yesterday, and my dear wife was nearly in tears at their tales of powerful magic and vengeful spirits inhabiting this land.

"Go, they said, for this is a great spirit, as old as the rocks, and your God cannot protect you. This land is not good for people of any race. A spirit (whose name may not be pronounced) set his mark upon this land when the earth was still new. This land is cursed — and more of the same, on and on until I lost patience with them and told them to be off before I made powerful magic with my old Betsy.

"Tho' my wife trembled, my little daughter proved fiercer than her Ma, swearing she would chop up that pagan spirit and have it for her supper — which made me roar with laughter, and the Indians to shake their heads as they hurried away."

Marilyn wondered what had happened to that fierce little girl. Had the Indians stolen her, admiring her spirit?

She read on about the deaths of the unbelieving Hoskins. Not only had the Indians set fire to the hasty wooden house; they had first butchered the inhabitants.

"They were disemboweled and torn apart, ripped by knives in the most hungry, savage, inhuman manner, and all for the sin of living

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on land sacred to a nameless spirit."

Marilyn thought of the knife Derek had said he'd found as a child.

Something slapped the window. Marilyn's head jerked up, and she stared out the window. It had begun to rain, and a rising wind slung small fists of rain at the glass.

She stared out at the landscape, shrouded now by the driving rain, and wondered why this desolate rocky land should be thought of as sacred. Her mind moved vaguely to thought of books on anthropology which might help, perhaps works on Indians of the region which might tell her more. The library in Janeville wouldn't have much — she had been there, and it wasn't much more than a small room full of historical novels and geology texts — but the librarian might be able to get books from other libraries around the state, perhaps one of the university libraries....

She glanced at her watch, realizing that school had let out long before; the children might be waiting at the bus stop now, in this terrible weather. She pushed aside the heavy green curtains.

"Derek —"

But the room was empty. He had already gone for the children, she thought with relief. He certainly did better at this job of being a parent than she did.

Of course, Kelly was his child; he'd had years to adjust to fatherhood. She wondered if he would buy a horse for Kelly and hoped that he wouldn't.

Perhaps it was silly to be worried about ancient Indian curses and to fear that a long-ago event would be repeated, but Marilyn didn't want horses in a barn where horses had once gone mad. There were no Indians here now, and no horses. Perhaps they would be safe.

Marilyn glanced down at the books still piled beside her, thinking of looking up the section about the horses. But she recoiled uneasily from the thought. Derek had already told her the story; she could check the facts later, when she was not alone in the house.

She got up. She would go and busy herself in the kitchen, and have hot chocolate and cinnamon toast waiting for the children.

The scream still rang in her ears and vibrated through her body. Marilyn lay still, breathing shallowly, and stared at the ceiling. What had she been dreaming?

It came again, muffled by distance, but as chilling as a blade of ice. It wasn't a dream; someone, not so very far away, was screaming.

Marilyn visualized the house on a map, trying to tell herself it had been nothing, the cry of some bird.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No one could be out there, miles from everything, screaming; it didn't make sense. And Derek was still sleeping, undisturbed. She thought about waking him, then repressed the thought as unworthy and sat up. She'd better check on the children, just in case it was one of them crying out of a nightmare. She did not go to the window; there would be nothing to see, she told herself.

Marilyn found Kelly out of bed, her arms wrapped around herself as she stared out the window.

"What's the matter?"

Kelly didn't shift her gaze. "I heard a horse," she said softly. "I heard it neighing. It woke me up."

"A horse?"

"It must be wild. If I can catch it and tame it, can I keep it?" Now she looked around, her eyes bright in the moonlight.

"I don't think..."

"Please?"

"Kelly, you were probably just dreaming."

"I heard it. It woke me up. I heard it again. I'm not imagining things," she said tightly.

"Then it was probably a horse belonging to one of the farmers around here."

"I don't think it belongs to anyone."

Marilyn was suddenly aware of how tired she was. Her body ached. She didn't want to argue with Kelly. Perhaps there had been a horse — a neigh could sound like a scream, she thought.

"Go back to bed, Kelly. You have to go to school in the morning. You can't do anything about the horse now."

"I'm going to look for it, though," Kelly said, getting back into bed. "I'm going to find it."

"Later."

As long as she was up, Marilyn thought as she stepped out into the hall, she should check on the other children, to be sure they were all sleeping.

To her surprise, they were all awake. They turned sleepy, bewildered eyes on her when she came in and murmured broken fragments of their dreams as she kissed them each in turn.

Derek woke as she climbed in beside him. "Where were you?" he asked. He twitched. "Christ, your feet are like ice!"

"Kelly was awake. She thought she heard a horse neighing."

"I told you," Derek said with sleepy smugness. "That's our ghost horse, back again."

The sky was heavy with the threat of snow; the day was cold and too still. Marilyn stood up from her typewriter in disgust and went downstairs. The house was silent except for the distant chatter of Derek's typewriter.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Where are the kids?" she asked from the doorway.

Derek gave her a distracted look, his hands still poised over the keys. "I think they all went out to clean up the barn."

"But the barn is closed — it's locked."

"Mmmm.'

Marilyn sighed and left him. She felt weighted by the chores of supervision. If only the children could go to school every day, where they would be safe and out of her jurisdiction. She thought of how easily they could be hurt or die, their small bodies broken. So many dangers, she thought, getting her coral-colored coat out of the front closet. How did people cope with the tremendous responsibility of other lives under their protection? It was an impossible task.

The children had mobilized into a small but diligent army, marching in and out of the barn with their arms full of hay, boards or tools. Marilyn looked for Kelly, who was standing just inside the big double doors and directing operations.

"The doors were chained shut," she said, confused. "How did you —"

"I cut it apart," Kelly said. "There was a hacksaw in the toolroom." She gave Marilyn a sidelong glance. "Daddy said we could take any tools from there that we needed."

Marilyn looked at her with uneasy respect, then glanced away to where the other children were working grimly with hands and hammers at the boards nailed across all the stall doors. The darkness of the barn was relieved by a storm lantern hanging from a hook.

"Somebody really locked this place up good," Kelly said. "Do you know why?"

Marilyn hesitated, then decided. "I suppose it was boarded up so tightly because of the way one of your early relatives died here."

Kelly's face tensed with interest. "Died? How? Was he murdered?"

"Not exactly. His horses killed him. They... turned on him one night, nobody ever knew why."

Kelly's eyes were knowing. "He must have been an awful man, then. Terribly cruel. Because horses will put up with almost anything. He must have done something so —"

"No. He wasn't supposed to have been a cruel man."

"Maybe not to *people.*"

"Some people thought his death was due to an Indian curse. The land here was supposed to be sacred; they thought this was the spirit's way of taking revenge."

Kelly laughed. "That's some excuse. Look, I got to get to work, OK?"

Marilyn dreamed she went out

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one night to saddle a horse. The barn was filled with them, all her horses, her pride and delight. She reached up to bridle one, a sorrel gelding, and suddenly felt — with disbelief that staved off the pain — powerful teeth bite down on her arm. She heard the bone crunch, saw the flesh tear, and then the blood....

She looked up in horror, into eyes which were reddened and strange.

A sudden blow threw her forward, and she landed face-down in dust and straw. She could not breathe. Another horse, her gentle black mare, had kicked her in the back. She felt a wrenching, tearing pain in her leg: when finally she could move she turned her head and saw the great yellow teeth, stained with her blood, of both her horses as they fed upon her. And the other horses, all around her, were kicking at their stalls. The wood splintered and gave, and they all came to join in the feast.

The children came clattering in at lunchtime, tracking snow and mud across the red-brick floor. It had been snowing since morning, but the children were oblivious to it. They did not, as Marilyn had expected, rush out shrieking to play in the snow but went instead to the barn, as they did every weekend now. It was almost ready, they said.

Kelly slipped into her chair and powdered her soup with salt. "Wait till you see what we found," she said breathlessly.

"Animal, vegetable or mineral?" Derek asked.

"Animal AND mineral."

"Where did you find it?" Marilyn asked.

The smallest child spilled soup in her lap and howled. When Marilyn got back to the table, everyone was talking about the discovery in the barn: Derek curious, the children mysterious.

"But what is it?" Marilyn asked.

"It's better to see it. Come with us after we eat."

The children had worked hard. The shrouded winter light spilled into the empty space of the barn through all the open half-doors of the stalls. The rotting straw and grain was all gone, and the dirt floor had been raked and swept clear of more than an inch of fine dust. The large design stood out clearly, white and clean against the hard earth.

It was not a horse. After examining it more closely, Marilyn wondered how she could have thought it was the depiction of a wild, rearing stallion. Horses have hooves, not three-pronged talons, and they don't have such a feline snake of a tail. The proportions of the body were wrong, too, once she

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

looked more carefully.

Derek crouched and ran his fingers along the outline of the beast. It had been done in chalk, but it was much more than just a drawing. Lines must have been deeply scored in the earth, and the narrow trough then filled with some pounded white dust.

"Chalk, I think," Derek said. "I wonder how deep it goes?" He began scratching with a forefinger at the side of the thick white line.

Kelly bent and caught his arm. "Don't ruin it."

"I'm not, honey." He looked up at Marilyn, who was still standing apart, staring at the drawing.

"It must be the Indian curse," she said. She tried to smile, but she felt an unease which she knew could build into an open dread.

"Do you suppose this is what the spirit who haunts this land is supposed to look like?" Derek asked.

"What else?"

"Odd that it should be a horse, then, instead of some animal indigenous to the area. The legend must have arisen after the white man —"

"But it's not a horse," Marilyn said. "Look at it."

"It's not a horse exactly, no," he agreed, standing and dusting his hands. "But it's more a horse than it is anything else."

"It's so fierce," Marilyn murmured. She looked away, into Kelly's eager face. "Well, now that you've cleaned up the barn, what are you going to do?"

"Now we're going to catch the horse."

"What horse?"

"The wild one, the one we hear at night."

"Oh.. that. Well, it must be miles away by now. Someone else must have caught it."

Kelly shook her head. "I heard it last night. It was practically outside my window, but when I looked it was gone. I could see its hoofprints in the snow."

"You're not going out again?"

The children turned blank eyes on her, ready to become hostile, or tearful, if she were going to be difficult.

"I mean," Marilyn said apologetically, "you've been out all morning, running around. And it's still snowing. Why don't you just let your food digest for a while — get out your coloring books, or a game or something, and play in here where its warm."

"We can't stop now," Kelly said. "We might catch the horse this afternoon."

"And if you don't, do you intend to go out every day until you do?"

"Of course," Kelly said. The other children nodded.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Marilyn's shoulders slumped as she gave in. "Well, wrap up. And dont go *too* far from the house in case it starts snowing harder. And don't stay out too long, or you'll get frostbite." The children were already moving away from her as she spoke. They live in another world, Marilyn thought, despairing.

She wondered how long this would go on. The barn project had held within it a definite end, but Marilyn could not believe the children would ever catch the horse they sought. She was not even certain there was a horse out in that snow to be caught, even though she had been awakened more than once by the shrill, distant screaming that might have been a horse neighing.

Marilyn went to Derek's office and climbed again into the hidden window seat. The heavy curtains muffled the steady beat of Derek's typewriter, and the falling snow muffled the country beyond the window. She picked up another of the small green volumes and began to read.

"Within a month of his arrival, Martin Hoskins was known in Janeville for two things. One: he intended to bring industry, wealth and population to upstate New York, and to swell the tiny hamlet into a city. Second: A man without wife or children, Hoskins' pride, passion and delight was in his six beautiful horses.

"Martin had heard the legend that his land was cursed, but, as he wrote to a young woman in New York City, 'The Indians were driven out of these parts long ago, and their curses with them, I'll wager. For what is an Indian curse without an Indian knife or arrow to back it?'

"It was true that the great Indian tribes had been dispersed or destroyed, but a few Indians, remained: tattered and homeless in the White Man's world. Martin Hoskins met one such young brave on the road to Janeville one morning.

"'I must warn you, sir,' said the ragged but proud young savage. 'The land upon which you dwell is inhabited by a powerful spirit.'

"'I've heard that tale before,' responded Hoskins, shortly but not unkindly. 'And I don't believe in your heathen gods; I'm not afraid of 'em.'

"'This spirit is no god of ours, either. But my people have known of it, and respected it, for as many years as we have lived on this land. Think of this spirit not as a god, but as a force.... something powerful in nature which cannot be reasoned with or fought — something like a storm.'

"'And what do you propose I do?' asked Hoskins.

"'Leave that place. Do not try to live there. The spirit cannot

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

follow you if you leave, but it cannot be driven out, either. The spirit belongs to the land as much as the land belongs to it.'

"Martin Hoskins laughed harshly. 'You ask me to run from something I do not believe in! Well, I tell you this: I believe in storms, but I do not run from them. I'm strong; what can that spirit do to me?'

"The Indian shook his head sorrowfully. 'I cannot say what it may do. I only know that you will offend it by dwelling where it dwells, and the more you offend it, the more certainly will it destroy you. Do not try to farm there, nor keep animals. That lands knows only one master and will not take to another. There is only one law, and one master on that land. You must serve it, or leave.'

"'I serve no master but myself — and my God,' Martin said."

Marilyn closed the book, not wanting to read of Martin's inevitable, and terrible, end. He kept animals, she thought idly. What if he had been a farmer? How would the spirit of the land have destroyed him then?

She looked out the window and saw with relief that the children were playing. They've finally given up their hunt, she thought, and wondered what they were playing now. Were they playing follow-the-leader? Dancing like Indians? Or horses, she thought, suddenly, watching their prancing feet and tossing heads. They were playing horses.

Marilyn woke suddenly, listening. Her body strained foward, her heart pounding too loudly, her mouth dry. She heard it again: the wild, mad cry of a horse. She had heard it before in the night, but never so close, and never so human-sounding.

Marilyn got out of bed, shivering violently as her feet touched the cold, bare floor and the chilly air raised bumps on her naked arms. She went to the window, drew aside the curtains, and looked out.

The night was still and as clear as an engraving. The moon lacked only a sliver more for fullness and shone out of a cloudless, star-filled sky. A group of small figures danced upon the snowy ground, jerking and prancing and kicking up a spray of snow. Now and again one of them would let out a shrill cry: half a horse's neigh, half a human wail. Marilyn felt her hairs rise as she recognized the puppet-like dancers below: the children.

She was tempted to let the curtains fall back and return to bed — to say nothing, to do nothing, to act as if nothing unusual had happened. But these were *her* children now, and she wasn't allowed that sort of irresponsibility.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The window groaned as she forced it open, and at the faint sound the children stopped their dance. As one, they turned and looked up at Marilyn.

The breath stopped in her throat as she stared down at their upturned faces. Everything was very still, as if that moment had been frozen within a block of ice. Marilyn could not speak; she could not think of what to say.

She withdrew back into the room, letting the curtains fall back before the open window, and she ran to the bed.

"Derek," she said, catching hold of him. "Derek, wake up." She could not stop her trembling.

His eyes moved behind their lids.

"Derek," she said urgently.

Now they opened and, fogged with sleep, looked at her.

"What is it, love?" He must have seen the fear in her face, for he pushed himself up on his elbows. "Did you have a bad dream?"

"Not a dream, no. Derek, your Uncle Martin — he could have lived here if he hadn't been a master himself. If he hadn't kept horses. The horses turned on him because they had found another master."

"What are you talking about?"

"The spirit that lives in this land," she said. She was not trembling, now. Perspiration beaded her forehead. "It uses the... the servants, or whatever you want to call them... it can't abide anyone else ruling here. If we..."

"You've been dreaming, sweetheart." He tried to pull her down beside him, but she shook him off. She could hear them on the stairs.

"Is our door locked?" she suddenly demanded.

"Yes, I think so." Derek frowned. "Did you hear something? I thought..."

"Children are a bit like animals, don't you think? At least, people treat them as if they were — adults, I mean. I suppose children must..."

"I *do* hear something. I'd better go —"

"Derek — No —"

The doorknob rattled, and there was a great pounding at the door.

"Who is that?" Derek said loudly.

"The children," Marilyn whispered.

The door splintered and gave way before Derek reached it, and the children burst through. There were so many of them, Marilyn thought, as she waited on the bed. And all she could seem to see was their strong, square teeth.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here's a totally fresh tale about a couple of cemetary salesmen and old Pretty Mouth. J. P. Dixon writes: "it was conceived after I returned to Montana after a time in the Soviet Union and the only way to keep myself and family off welfare was to take a job selling cemetary property. The story took place in the Northwest, not the South, but all the other details are absolutely correct, right to the very last gulp." Gulp.

The Final Close

by J. P. DIXON

The two cemetery salesmen made such a killing in the little town of Hail Right, on the very edge of the great McWhinegar Slough, that they couldn't wait to push on towards Chickasaw City where they could make even more money.

"Chickasaw it is," they agreed and shook on it. This, in spite of the fact that every good soul in Hail Right warned them against it.

"You go pokin' around back there, you'll get eat up. Old Pretty Mouth grab you for sure, you go back in there." But both the salesmen had committed themselves and were bound to go anyway.

To be fair, it was the older man, Harve, who was most eager to push on. The kid still had his doubts. So far, he's been only a trainee on probation, but in Chickasaw, Harve promised, he'd become a straight forty per-center, and the kid wanted that money — bad.

On the other hand, though, he didn't like fooling people, or scaring them, or hollering at them to make them feel bad about the Beloved Departed; and he didn't like to worry them about Death gobbling them up when they weren't looking, the way Harve said he had to do if he wanted to sell.

The kid had graduated from high school and he knew right from wrong. "The rest is up to you, Son," his old dad told him the day he left. "You travel alone up the Highway of Life. Nothing more we can do for you once you're pointed straight and true."

"You know what this is, Kid?" asked Harve as the two of them climbed into the front seat of Harve's big secondhand Caddy. "You know what this is we've stumbled into?"

The kid didn't presume to answer. He kept his eyes to the floor and his gaze to Harve's white

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

patent-shoes with the built-ups. Harve had class, no doubt about it, and the kid didn't guess he needed any smart answers from a greenhorn like him.

"Pure virgin territory, that's what it is." He turned his big blunt face with the lavender-tinted glasses full on the kid, and the kid felt his own face grow hot and thick at the hated word.

How did Harve know? Could he tell just by looking? Little Miss Innocence they'd called him all through high school. Even his mother, who knew Tarot, seemed to agree. Once she showed him the card of The Fool and said, "Son, that for sure is you. All you need is one of those poles to carry your lunch sack over your shoulder, and you're a dead ringer."

The kid was sure she meant SEX because that was what it was all about and he knew that she knew he hadn't been able to find any.

But Harve wasn't thinking along those lines. "For the love of Sweet Jesus," he whispered in soft amazement, "they've never even *seen* a door-to-door."

It was a good road at first. That is, the pavement was broad and smooth with enough open space on either side and enough trees and bushes, trees dark as brush strokes against a flaming sky, that they did not see the slough to worry about it. But the smell of the slough was ever at their nostrils. The smell followed them; the persistent smell of dead water followed them, engulfed them, wrapped around them so slowly and so completely that they never even noticed that point at which they had stopped breathing the good air of fields and browse and were completely overtaken by rot and the odors of rot.

The air was hot and heavy. It was *so* hot the kid thought he'd die then and there. Even so, he didn't want to take his suit jacket off. It was a new suit and the shoulders were padded way beyond his own shoulders. He liked to look sharp.

Strange silver-winged insects were sucked into the car because the air conditioner didn't work quite right, and they had to keep the windows down so they wouldn't suffocate. The kid swallowed a couple of the smaller insects by accident and got at least one of them up his nose, but he has having such a good time tooling along in that big yellow beast he hardly noticed.

There were lots of girls out there, there had to be. And how could they miss him in a Cadillac? Could they miss a sore thumb? Could they? Could they? He waved and was gone before they could wave back. There was one, though, a real pretty one with tangled black hair hanging a big chenille bed-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spread up on a line — or maybe taking it down, he couldn't tell which. He waved at her when she was stooping over, and she stood up and threw a dirty finger at him. It was then he saw it wasn't anything like a bedspread she was hanging; it was a big hand-painted sign which said: TURN BACK NOW YOU SINNERS — THE JAWS OF HELL AWAIT YOU.

Harve couldn't understand what the kid was laughing about. He wanted to talk sales. "Stick with me, Kid, and you're in the money. You got a way about you, you know. People in these parts, they'll trust someone like you. Take a city guy like me, plunk him down here with these hicks, and there's a little more resistance. But you now ..."

The kid liked talking about himself; it didn't happen very often. "I'm country too, I guess that's why they like me. Course my family is all up-country folks, don't know too much about these swamplanders. Still, as you say, folks is folks."

"That's why I decided to take you on," said Harve, keeping a level voice. "You look dumb. Nobody'd think you'd ever try and put something over on them."

"And I wouldn't neither," said the kid, meaning it.

Harve gave him a quick look. "You know salesmen are the backbone of this nation, don't you?"

The kid hadn't thought about it.

"Well, think about it. You let down sales, you let down America."

Sometimes the kid wondered if America was the same as God, but that kind of thinking hurt his brain. So he didn't spend much time at it.

When they came to the Y, where one branch of the road led home and the other swerved swampwards, Harve stopped for a tank of gas and gave the kid a big wad of ones to get burgers and shakes from a little place across the street. "Bring back all you can carry," said Harve with a sly wink that the kid had to think about.

It was cool inside. There was an electric blower on a block of cement behind the counter that was whipping up a storm of styrofoam cups, crumpled napkins, and tubular wrappings from plastic straws. A beautiful woman was too busy polishing the counter top to notice him when he came in. "Hey!" he called out. "You open for business?" The suit and the wad of bills gave him a confidence he'd never felt before, but she was not impressed. Her shiny curls bounced up and down and up and down as she scrubbed.

"Say, give me a couple dozen burgers or so and a couple of chocolate shakes — when you can find the time."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That size order got to her. She turned and looked at him. "You got money to pay?"

It was then he noticed she was not as beautiful as he had hoped. Her skin was bumpy, and her eyes were so bright and bored, her chin so pointy, she looked more like a mouse in a Dynel wig than the girl he'd been holding out for.

"I'm with him," the kid told her, being cool about the fact that Harve was pulling the big Caddy up to the door and honking to hurry him up.

She threw the buns and the meat onto the grill. "So what are you guys selling?"

Somehow he didn't like to say. There was nothing wrong in what they were doing, but a girl like her ... she'd never understand the way they did it. He knew she'd laugh and he couldn't stand it if she laughed. He tried to make a joke instead. "We're the backbone of the nation, me and him."

He'd wanted her to laugh with him, but she didn't; she laughed to herself, piping squeals of laughter as she turned the burgers. He tried to explain it the way Harve told it to him, about America and God and all, but he botched it. His face got red and his jacket got wetter and wetter under the arms while he stuttered and stammered and wished he were dead.

"You're fulla shit," she told him. She loaded the burgers into a brown paper bag and fixed the shakes in take-out cartons with lids. "You're chock full of it."

"No, really!" He was mad. "We're going up to Chickasaw City, and when we come back we'll be looking for some fun. Know what I mean? And we're going to have plenty of where-with-all to pay for it, too. Get me?"

She got him all right but she wasn't selling. "Nothing up there but poor and ignorant people."

"Well, that's what we're counting on. The poor and the ignorant gotta die like anybody else, and we've got easy time-payments with an easy down, and the money rolls in like ... like it's going outa style." With an air of superiority, he peeled off some ones from his wad. "Keep the change, sweetheart." She definitely was not his type.

She, however, had burst into a fresh shower of squeals and giggles. "You're ... you're cemetery salesmen! That's what you are. You're going up to Chickasaw to sell graves!" Well, that realization did her in. She broke out in a long hysterical screech of laughter that seemed to be pointed on both ends. "That's gross! That is really something gross! Won't Old Pretty Mouth have a time with you guys." She shrieked again and tears of hilarity were pouring down her face when the kid left with the bag of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

burgers and the two chocolate shakes.

"What's the matter with her?" asked Harve when the kid got back into the Caddy.

"Got ants in her pants."

"Haven't they all."

God! those burgers tasted good. There were a dozen or so apiece. The kid'd never had his fill of burgers before, but by the time he'd knocked off five, he was getting that real good stuffed feeling.

"Eat up," said Harve and tossed the bag at him. "The rest are yours." The kid went to work on them, washing them down with the best chocolate shake he'd ever tasted.

"Nothing like grub when you're hungry, right, Kid?"

The kid was too busy stuffing his mouth to answer.

The hot food made him feel much better about things. After all, he'd had a long, hard day in Hail Right tramping the sidewalks, knocking on doors, showing people the pictures of Agony at the Graveside while Harve made people cry. "That's the only way, Kid. They don't cry, they don't buy. Remember it. You got to hurt them a little. What you got to do is back up the hearse and let 'em smell the flowers."

The road was narrow now, tight and unpleasant. In the darkness of night, wet trees brushed against both sides of the car and gave the kid the funny feeling he was dropping down some long sticky gullet.

It didn't bother Harve though. "Bitter with the sweet, Kid," he said when asked could they please turn back. "Lots of money in there. You hit your stride, you'll have money runnin' out your ears. Year before last I made me sixty thou up north of here."

"Sixty thou?"

"Sixty thou. Made it and lost it."

"Lost it?" he echoed dumbly. "Lost it how?"

"Pinball."

That was not where the kid wanted to lose his.

They had to sleep in the Caddy that night. Harve pulled off to the side of the road and got in the back where he took off all his clothes and folded them neatly, lavender eyeglasses on top of the pile, white patents with built-ups wiped clean with spit on a hanky. "Got to look good for the people," he said, crossing his arms up over his chest. "Wrinkled clothes make you down'n out and down'n-outers never win. Remember it." In no time, he was dead to the world clad in nothing but his birthday suit and a little citronella.

It took the kid much longer, what with all the prickly little fears at the nape of his neck and the mosquitoes singing in his hair. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

awful suffocating darkness gave him the shakes when he rolled the windows up to keep the mosquitoes out.

Once, he looked out across the dark swamp when he went to take a leak, and he saw the moon upside-down like a face all ruined and dead afloat on the poisonous water. Somewhere something rippled the surface.

"Native superstition," was what Harve claimed. "There isn't nothin' can eat you up, if you don't believe in it."

Somewhere something gurgled and burped.

The kid heard it and strained his eyes to stare into the vile darkness. He was glad he still had his shorts on. The sound came again, closer and more awful than before. The kid clamped his hands into fists at this sides and cried out against all things not seen and not understood. "Oh, please, God. I want to go home. I want to go *home*."

He could have gone right then and there and he knew it. He could have gotten his graduation suit from the big yellow Caddy and walked home or maybe hitched a ride at the Y, but he didn't. He got back into the car and started thinking about all that money pouring out his ears, and he finally fell asleep with his head beneath the steering wheel and dreamed about girls, girls, girls ... girls hugging him up one side and down the other, girls begging for his sixty thou.

They were both in for a big surprise when they got to Chickasaw City late the next morning. "Hell, there's no city at all," said Harve in some dismay. "Just a bunch of shacks. Not even any people around."

Just the same, they jacked themselves up and went to work. First they chose the biggest house they could find, hoping for a decent down on a pair of lots and vaults, but a big cotton mouth snake lay in the path. So they went on to the next house, where there was nobody home.

"Pretty quiet," ventured the kid.

"Pretty."

It was then they heard shouts and gruff voices and squawking of frightened chickens. "Where there's life ..." said the kid.

"That's my boy," said Harve, looking lots happier. "Let's go get 'em."

"Knock 'em dead," said the kid, according to their private ritual. They punched each other twice and started up the street, left the Caddy behind in their eagerness, did a little buck'n wing and a little kick-step like a vaudeville team kicking and grinning in the dusty streets of Chickasaw City.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A short squat woman was out in the yard. She had an ax in one hand, and from the other hand she had a white rooster swinging by his heels. She had piercing blue eyes and a fine head of cracker-colored hair that looked as though mice had been at it. She did not seem overjoyed to see two salesmen tramping through her yard where many headless chicken bodies, some dead and some still dying, made crazy patterns in the hot morning sunshine.

"Hate to get caught with blood on my hands," she muttered crossly as she dropped both the ax and the rooster and hurried to the house. "God-damned tourists and thrill seekers," she swore at the kid as she passed him. "Never will give a body any peace."

For one paralyzed moment the rooster didn't run. It stared at the kid with yellow terror-filled eyes, its beak half-open gasping air.

"Run, little fellow," said the kid quite suddenly. "Run for your life."

The rooster ran. A flash of white feathers over the bloody ground and a single terrified squawk as it tore through the buck-brush, through the thorns and the briars. Several long tail feathers pulled loose in its rush down the only path there was to take between the steep walls of the narrow canyon.

"Sure hope he makes it," said the kid watching him go.

"He won't." Harve was having trouble with his white shoes, but he wasn't in the least downhearted. "Them that's got drumsticks are bound, sooner or later, to lose them." He handed over the kit with the pictures of Agony at the Graveside. "Get yourself ready," he warned. "Now remember, when we close this sale, we close it hard. Old women are the best possible customers, and we can't let this one get

FREE: BIG 25th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

The subscription coupon on the next page will bring you a free copy of our October 1974 Silver anniversary issue, with 48 extra pages. It includes stories by R. Bretnor, Harlan Ellison, Philip K. Dick, Gordon R. Dickson, Jack Vance, Theodore Sturgeon, Isaac Asimov, Poul Anderson and Frederik Pohl & C. M. Kornbluth. You may use the coupon to enter a new subscription or to renew or extend a current one. The coupon is backed by this copy, and removal does not affect the text of the surrounding story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

away. Shh ... here she comes."

The old woman came back with a gun, a long black rifle. She had six young men with her too and they mostly had clubs, except a couple had jack handles and one had a busted-off crowbar. "Sick 'em," she said.

It seemed forever that he stood there on frozen legs while the sun burned overhead. It seemed forever that the men came towards him and he could not remember how to run. And when he did run, Harve was way ahead running down the only path there was to take: the path through the buckbrush, though the thorns and the briars.

He watched Harve turn to the side and try to climb the walls of the canyon. He watched him claw at the crumbling rock and slick brown fungus, trying to get a handhold. He saw him lose his eyeglasses and rip his pants, and watched in disbelief as Harve pulled off the white patent-leather shoes and hurled them at the men, who didn't have to yell or scream to throw a fright into them. The men didn't have to scream or yell; they formed a tight line across the open end of the canyon and pressed ever forward until the kid found himself up to his neck in slough water with lots of specky things floating in it.

Where to hide? Where to hide? Where to hide that nothing could find him? No place. No place left.

Harve was at his side now, screaming in his ear. For the kid there was no time to scream. Not the long, thin scream of desperation, nor the dying scream of regret. Something opened its jaws and swallowed Harve. The kid saw clearly then for the first time. Old Pretty Mouth looked just the way the kid imagined him all along, and there was no escape.

Mercury Press, Inc., Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753
Enter my subscription to F&SF, and rush me a free copy of October 1974.
I enclose ☐ $10.00 for one year; ☐ $24.00 for three years.

6-7

Please print

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State ..... Zip # ....

Add $1.00 per year for Canada and Mexico; $2.00 for other foreign countries
Please allow six weeks for delivery of first copy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE FINAL COLLAPSE

When I was young, even younger than I am now (if you can imagine such a thing), I read the books written by my science-writing predecessors.

I was particularly fond of reading about the amazing world of relativity and was much taken with the new geometric view of the Universe — the manner in which space curved in the vicinity of matter, curving more and more sharply as masses were greater and greater and more and more condensed. The gravitational effect, I gathered, was a way of describing the manner in which all objects, even light, skidded around the curve.

I was told directly by these books, or I inferred it (I no longer remember which), that if one could get a mass that was large enough and sufficiently condensed, one could imagine space curved so sharply about the body as to leave only a bottle-neck connection to the Universe generally. If the mass were even larger and more condensed, the bottle neck would be smaller and smaller until finally, at some critical value of mass and density, it pinched off altogether, leaving the super-mass effectively isolated in what amounted to a universe of its own and unable in

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

any way to affect the great Universe of which it had once been a part.

Even as late as 1965, I believed this, for in my article SQU-U-U-USH (F & SF, November 1965), after having discussed the neutron star,* I went on to discuss an object compressed even more extremely than that. Lacking a name for such an object, I invented the term "super-neutron star."

The Sun would become a neutron star if, without losing mass, it were compressed into a tiny sphere 14 kilometers across. If it were compressed still further, into a ball but 6 kilometers across, it would become what I called a super-neutron star, with a density and a surface gravity each about ten times that of a Sun-sized neutron star and an escape velocity equal to the speed of light. Since nothing can go faster than light (excluding the hypothesized, and still problematical, tachyons) nothing — not even light — can leave such a super-neutron star.

I visualized the result, in 1965, as being an example of a tiny pinched-off bit of the Universe, unable to affect the rest. I made the following statements about it in SQU-U-U-USH:

"A super-neutron star could not, therefore, affect the rest of the Universe in any way. It could give no sign of its existence, neither radiational nor gravitational."

"The super-neutron star has been pinched off into a tiny universe all its own, forever closed and self-sufficient."

"Naturally, we could never detect a super-neutron star even if it existed, no matter how close it was."

Alas, I was wrong. Apparently, while matter and electromagnetic radiation cannot escape from a super-Neutron star, the gravitational effect will continue to make itself evident. The super-neutron star therefore can, and does, affect outside parts of the Universe through its gravitation and does not occupy a universe of its own. And because it does affect the rest of the Universe it can, in theory, be detected.

I should also mention that my suggested name, super-neutron star, did not catch on with the world in general. Instead, the reasoning went as follows:

A super-neutron mass with an escape velocity equal to, or greater than, the speed of light cannot emit particles possessing mass. This means that any piece of ordinary matter can fall in, but can't come out again. The effect is that of falling into an infinitely deep hole in space. What's more, since even light can't emerge for it, we can't see it. It is a completely black hole.

**See also last month's article.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And that's it. The super-neutron star is generally known as a "black hole." I don't know exactly who first used the phrase or when he first used it, but I know that I never heard it till after 1965.

Of course, black hole doesn't sound very scientific, and the term "collapsed star" has been suggested instead. This would be abbreviated to "collapsar," a form analogous to "quasar" and "pulsar."

I don't think that collapsar will ever become the term of choice, however. Black hole may sound prosaic, but the picture it gives rise to is so dramatic, and so essentially accurate, that I don't expect it to be abandoned.

So, having talked about white dwarfs two months ago, and neutron stars last month, let's go on to black holes.

The mass of a white dwarf, pulled together by an intense gravitational field, is kept from total collapse by the resistance of the electronic fluid, which can be pictured as electrons in contact. Nevertheless, if the mass of a star is great enough, it will be too great and produce a gravitational field too intense to be held back by the electronic fluid. In that case, the star, when it collapses will smash right through the white-dwarf stage and collapse to a neutron star, where it is a neutronic fluid, neutrons in contact, that withstands further collapse.

Surely, even the mashed-together neutrons must have a limit of resistance. In 1939, J. Robert Oppenheimer reasoned that at some point the neutronic fluid must give way and that when that happened, there existed nothing at all — *nothing* — that could withstand the gravitational collapse. There would be one final collapse to zero volume, and a black hole would form.

It would appear that the crucial mass-level is 3.2 times the Sun's mass, so that there can be no neutron star more massive than that.

About one star in a thousand possesses a mass more than 3.2 times that of our Sun. That doesn't sound like much, but it comes to 100,000,000 stars in our Galaxy alone. What's more, these massive stars are short-lived. Whereas our Sun will remain on the main sequence, radiating steadily and quietly, as it does now, for some 12 billion years altogether (5 billion years of which have elapsed) before it expands and then collapses, these 100,000,000 massive stars will remain on the main sequence for less than a billion years altogether. In the 15 billion life-span of the Universe, there has been time for many generations of these massive stars to be born and collapse.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The total number of these massive-star collapses may well be in the many billions in the lifetime of our Galaxy. Can all these billions of massive stars have collapsed into black holes?

Not necessarily. Such massive stars will invariably explode as supernovas before collapsing, and the supernova may scatter anywhere up to nine tenths of the mass of a star through space, leaving only a minor remnant to collapse. That minor remnant may be small enough to collapse to a neutron star only.

Can it be, in fact, that a supernova always blows off enough mass to prevent black hole formation? Can it be that every star, no matter how massive, ends up as a neutron star plus a vast cloud of dust and gas?

No, we can't rule out black holes altogether, for it would appear that any star which possesses more than 20 times the mass of the Sun will not be able to get rid of enough mass by supernova explosions to leave less than 3.2 Sun-masses behind. Such a star will collapse to a black hole as a matter of necessity.

There are about 20,000 stars in our Galaxy right now which are of spectral class O and which have a mass of anywhere from 20 to 70 times that of the Sun.

Such O-class stars are very short-lived and are not likely to remain on the main sequence for even as long as a million years. During the lifetime of our Universe, we can imagine as many as 15,000 generations of such giant stars coming to birth and eventually collapsing, coming to birth and eventually collapsing —

And, of course, some stars of less than 20 times the Sun's mass might also end up with a collapsing remnant more than 3.2 times the Sun's mass.

On the whole, then, we can conclude that there *must* be black holes in the Universe, perhaps even many millions of them in our Galaxy alone.

In that case, if black holes exist, and in reasonable quantities, can they be detected?

You can't detect any particles coming out of them, or any electromagnetic radiation either, but you *can*, in theory, detect gravitational effects.

To be sure, the total gravitational pull exerted by a black hole at a great distance is no greater than the total gravitational pull exerted by its mass in any other form. Thus, if you were a hundred light years away from a giant star with fifty times the mass of the Sun, its gravitational pull would be so diluted by distance that it would be indetectably small. If,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

somehow, that star were to become a black hole with a mass fifty times the mass of the Sun, its gravitational pull at a distance of a hundred light-years would be precisely the same as before and would still be undetectable.

The difference arises at close quarters. The black hole is much smaller in size than a giant star of the same mass. An object near the surface of the black hole is much closer to the center of mass than an object near the surface of the giant star would be. The object near the black hole would experience a gravitational intensity enormously greater than the object near the giant star. (Even if we imagine an object penetrating the surface of the giant star and approaching the center in that fashion, an increasing portion of the mass of the giant star is left behind and the penetrating object is attracted only by the mass closer to the center than it itself is. When the object is within a few kilometers of the star-center, the gravitational pull on it is very small.)

What we can hope to do, then, is to detect not the total gravitational pull of a black hole but the effects of the locally enormous gravitational intensities it produces.

By Einstein's theory of general relativity, for instance, gravitational activity releases gravitational waves. These carry so excessively minute an amount of energy that detecting them is virtually beyond hope. If there is any chance of detection at all, this would come about when gravitational waves enormously more energetic than is usual would be produced. To produce *such* gravitational waves, a large black hole in the process of formation or growth might be required.

In the late 1960s, the American physicist, Joseph Weber, used large aluminum cylinders weighing several tons each and located hundreds of miles apart as gravitational wave detectors. Such cylinders would be very slightly compressed and expanded as gravitational waves passed; and since gravitational waves have incredibly long wavelengths, two cylinders, even widely separated, would react simultaneously to the same gravitational wave. In fact, it is this simultaneous reaction that is the surest indication that a gravitational wave is being detected.

Weber reported gravitational waves and produced considerable excitement. Weber's data made it appear that enormously energetic gravitational events were taking place at the center of the Galaxy and that a large black hole might be located there.

Other scientists have, however, tried to repeat Weber's findings and have failed, so that at this time the question of whether gravitational waves

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have been detected remains moot. There may be a black hole at the center of the Galaxy, but Weber's route to its detection is discounted now, and other ways of detecting black holes must be considered.

Another way, still using the black hole's intense gravitational field in its immediate neighborhood, is to study the behavior of light that might be skimming past a black hole. Light will curve slightly in the direction of a gravitational source, and it will do so detectably even when it skims past a large object with an ordinary gravitational field, like our Sun.

Suppose, now, that a distant galaxy has a black hole lying precisely between itself and Earth. The light of the galaxy will pass the point-like black hole, itself invisible, on all sides. On all sides, the light is bent toward the black hole and is made to converge in our direction. This does to light, gravitationally, what a lens does through refraction. The effect, therefore, is spoken of as a "gravitational lens."

If we were to see some galaxy which, despite its distance, looked abnormally large and, possibly, distorted as well, we might suspect it was being magnified by a gravitational lens and that between it and outselves lies a black hole. No such phenomenon, however, has yet been observed. Some other technique must be used.

Black holes are not alone in the Universe. There could well be other matter in the vicinity, and such matter, passing near the black hole, might collide with it and be engulfed or might move into orbit about it.

In approaching a black hole, any object larger than a dust particle would be subjected to such enormous tidal forces that it would be reduced to dust. Around the black hole, then, would be an "accretion disc," a kind of asteroidal belt of dust particles about 200 kilometers away from the center.

If the black hole happened to be an isolated one, with no great quantities of matter anywhere within many light-years, the accretion disc would be very thin, perhaps even non-existent. If, on the other hand, there were a large source of ordinary matter in the immediate neighborhood, a thick and dense accretion disc could result.

We might suppose that an accretion disc would circle the black hole forever, as the Earth circles the Sun. There are, however, many mutual collisions that pass energy from one particle to another. Some particles are bound to lose energy and spiral in closer to the black hole. The closer the spiral, the harder it is for a particle to back out again, and once it gets past a certain critical difference, it can nevermore emerge.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There is thus a continual drizzle of matter entering the black hole. Nor does the accretion disc necessarily die out, since further supplies of matter continue to arrive from whatever matter-source exists in the neighborhood.

Matter entering the black hole loses gravitational energy, which is converted into heat. The matter is further heated by the stretching and compression of tidal forces. The result is that matter entering the black hole is heated to enormous temperatures and gives off a whole range of electromagnetic radiation, right up to energetic x-rays.

Thus, while we cannot detect a bare black hole surrounded by utter vacuum, we might conceivably detect one that is swallowing matter, since that matter would, as its death-cry, emit x-rays.

The x-rays would have to be intense enough to detect across many light-years of space, and so it would have to represent more than a thin drizzle of occasional dust. There would have to be torrents of matter swirling inward, and this would mean that the black hole, to be detected, would have to be in pretty specialized surroundings. It would have to be within easy reach of large supplies of matter.

Those regions where stars are thickly strewn are therefore much more likely to have a detectable black hole than are those regions where stars are sparse. Nowhere are stars distributed more thickly than at the cores of galaxies, and it is there perhaps, that we ought to look.

In recent years, there has been increasing evidence that some spectacularly energetic explosions have taken place in galactic cores in the past and, in a few cases, even as we watch. Could black holes in some form or other be responsible?

Indeed, a very compact and energetic microwave source has been detected at the center of our own Galaxy. Could that represent a black hole there? Some astronomers speculate that this is so and that our Galactic black hole has the mass of 100,000,000 stars, or 1/1000 the entire Galaxy. It would have a diameter of 700,000,000 kilometers (that of a red giant) and would be large enough to disrupt whole stars through tidal effects, or gulp them down whole before they could break up, if the approach was fast enough.

Perhaps every galaxy has a black hole at the core, and if that is so then the one of that type that is nearest to ourselves is the one in our own Galaxy, of course, and it is 30,000 light-years away. A large black hole would be an uncomfortably near neighbor but 30,000 light-years is satisfactory insulation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It may not be that galactic cores are the only places where detectable black holes might occur. Outside the core there are globular clusters, made up of tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of stars packed together in a spherical conglomerate.

Such globular clusters (of which there are a couple of hundred in our Galaxy) are not as densely packed as a galactic core is, but at their centers star concentrations are very much higher than they are in our Sun's neighborhood, for instance.

And, as a matter of fact, a number of globular clusters have been tabbed as x-ray sources. The possibility therefore exists that there are indeed black holes at the center of some clusters, and perhaps of every cluster. Some astronomers speculate that such globular-cluster black holes may have masses 10 to 100 times that of the Sun.

In that case, there are some detectable black holes closer than the core of our Galaxy. The closest globular-cluster black hole would be the one in Omega Centauri, which is 22,000 light-years away.

The trouble with black holes at the center of galaxies or of globular clusters is that you can't get a real look at them. You can detect unusual radiation and infer that there *may* be a black hole there. However, since many thousands or even millions of ordinary stars lie between the possible black hole and ourselves, forming an impenetrable barrier to any closer examination, we can only guess as to the black hole's existence, and we may never be able to do more than that.

What we need, then, is a black hole that has plenty of matter in its vicinity, enough to form a large accretion disc, and yet one that is sufficiently alone in space so that we can study the spot where it is located without anything of importance in between.

This might seem like a mutually exclusive pair of requirements, but it isn't. What we want is a binary, a pair of stars revolving about a mutual center of gravity, with one of them a black hole and one a normal star. In that case, if the two objects are close enough, there may be a sufficient leak of matter from the normal star to the black hole to form an accretion disc which would, in turn, serve as an x-ray source.

So we should find some object in the heavens which consists of a normal star and an x-ray source circling about a mutual center of gravity, with no star visible at the site of the x-ray source.

In the early 1960s, x-ray sources were first discovered in the sky through the use of detectors carried beyond the atmosphere by rockets.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(X-rays will not penetrate our atmosphere.) In 1965, a particularly intense x-ray source was detected in the constellation Cygnus and was named Cygnus X-1. It is thought to be about 10,000 light-years from us.

The mere fact that Cygnus X-1 was so intense an x-ray source roused interest. In those years, neutron stars were still being searched for and Cygnus X-1 might well be a neutron star.

In 1969, an x-ray detecting satellite was launched from the coast of Kenya on the fifth anniversary of Kenyan independence. It was named Uhuru from the Swahili word for "freedom." It multiplied knowledge of x-ray sources to unlooked-for heights, since it detected 161 of them. Half the x-ray sources it detected were in our own Galaxy, and three of them were in globular clusters.

In 1971, Uhuru detected a marked change in x-ray intensity in Cygnus X-1, and this was particularly interesting. By that time neutron stars had been discovered, and it was known that x-rays emitted by it would come in regular pulses. An irregular change was much more likely to arise from a black hole where much would depend on events in the accretion disc and where matter might push in in greater quantities at some times than others. The fact that Uhuru detected that sudden change in Cygnus X-1, combined with its x-ray brilliance, made the chance of a black hole look suddenly good.

It was necessary to locate Cygnus X-1 with great exactness, and that could best be done by microwaves, which should also be arriving from the source if it were a black hole. Microwaves were indeed detected, and the use of sophisticated radio telescopes made it possible to pinpoint the source very accurately and place it just next to a visible star.

The star was HD-226868, a large, hot, blue star of spectral class B, which was some 30 times as massive as our Sun. An astronomer at the University of Toronto, C. T. Bolt, showed HD-226868 to be a binary. It is clearly circling in an orbit with a period of 5.6 days; the nature of this orbit makes it appear that the other object in the binary is perhaps 5 to 8 times as massive as the Sun.

The companion star cannot be seen, however, so it cannot be a normal star. A normal star with a mass 5 to 8 times that of the Sun would be dimmer than its companion, but it would be bright enough to see. The only reason it would not be seen would be its small size. It might be a white dwarf, a neutron star, or a black hole. A white dwarf can't be more massive than 1.4 times the Sun, and a neutron star can't be more massive than 3.2 times the Sun. That leaves us with only a black hole as a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

possibility, and one that is closer than any galactic-core black hole or globular-cluster black hole could possibly be.

Another point in favor of the black hole hypothesis is that HD-226868 seems to be expanding as though it were entering its red-giant stage. Its matter would therefore very likely be spilling over into the grip of the black hole companion. This would form a large accretion disc and would account for the fact that Cygnus X-1 is such an intense x-rays source.

The one catch is the matter of distance.

Suppose you have a particular binary under study and can establish a carefully observed angular separation and period. That angular separation of so many hundredths of a second of arc can be converted into a spatial separation of so many millions of kilometers, if you know the distance. The greater the distance, the greater the real separation must be to produce the observed angular separation.

But the greater the real separation, the greater the gravitational interaction between the stars must be to produce the observed period. The greater the gravitational interaction between the stars, the greater the total mass of the two stars.

If Cygnus X-1 is indeed 10,000 light-years away, then the mass of the two stars is as I've given them and the x-ray source is too massive to be anything but a black hole.

If Cygnus X-1 is, however, for some reason, much closer than that (and stellar distances, except for the nearest stars, can be quite uncertain) then the mass of the stars would be much less than we think they are. In that case, the invisible object serving as an x-ray source might be a neutron star or a white dwarf, rather than a black hole. Some have even suggested that it could, conceivably, be that utterly unremarkable object, a red dwarf. (Three quarters of all the stars in existence are red dwarfs.)

However, the astronomical majority seems to hold for the 10,000 light-year distance and the black hole — and since black holes are dramatic and imagination-stretching, that is a pleasant thought to science fiction people like ourselves.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here is a good, strong story with an absolutely convincing alien environment. The first of many, we hope, from Mr. Guthridge, who was born in 1948 in Vancouver, Washington and currently teaches writing and advertising at Loras College in Dubuque.

The Exiled, The Hunted

by GEORGE GUTHRIDGE

1

The mudbeasts had stopped trumpeting. Except for the screech-bugs and the sound of Nassam's own footsteps in the knee-deep, whitish muck, the swamp was quiet. It was morning; sunlight was seeping through the tangle of spongeleaves and hanging moss.

Stooped beneath the weight of the mudbeast he carried over his shoulders, he slogged on toward the hutsite, threading between tree trunks. His face was drawn and runneled with sweat, and he gazed into the swampmists through eyes blank with fatigue. Ahead, where the trunks thinned out and the ground was firm, was the rendezvous point.

Only Leeani was waiting; the other hunters and huntresses apparently had gone on. Using her spear for support, she was squatting, a thin rope coiled around her shoulder. Like himself, she was a lithe hominid, with gray almond-shaped eyes and taloned fingers; to offset the humidity she was naked and well-shaved: hairless except for the tuft of hair at the end of her tail.

Nassam stopped before her, let the mudbeast fall. A small animal with a large head and bloated torso, its limbs and breathing trumpet sprawling like tentacles, it flopped onto the ground and turned over, its eyes opening, the pupils black and enormous. Its flesh was slimed with blood, and the tissue within the earslits quivered. Hands on hips, Nassam arched his back until it cracked. He closed his eyes, breathing deeply. "So the others did not stay," he said.

She shook her head.

He sighed angrily, then knelt;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she helped him lift the mudbeast. "Sometimes they seem to forget who's leader," he said, rising with effort.

"Sometimes you seem to forget *how* to lead."

He jerked around toward her, narrowing his eyes.

"You know hunting is the only good thing we have here on Swamp," she went on. "Yet for the past three hunts you've reserved for yourself the honor of bringing in the kill. Do you think that's wise, Nassam?"

"It was my decision. They should respect it." But perhaps he thought, she had a point. He *hadn't* considered the others' feelings. Just assumed that since he had been the one to jump into the mudbeast's wallow, wrestling with it as it heaved and trumpeted and almost buried him in its struggle to submerge, while the others stood at a safer distance, jabbing with their spears — that they would not hesitate to accept his being beast carrier.

"You're a good leader," she said. "Though not always an understanding one."

Again, he glared. His tail came up close to his legs. But her insight startled and shamed him, and when their eyes met he saw himself mirrored — a tall man who seemed even taller within her gaze. He suddenly realized she was chiding him out of love. Her eyes were moist, and for a moment, his head bowed beneath the mudbeast, he was conscious only of her eyes — and of the sweat trickling down his temple. He swallowed thickly. "Next time the honor shall go to someone else," he heard himself say.

"Yes, someone else," she said, her gaze still locked with his.

Then the moment passed. Once, he might have forsaken his mate, Chola — he, who had mated not for love but children — and given his heart to this catlike woman who was ten years older than himself. But during the past three years — ever since the sickness had begun to ravage the camp — his heart had known only desperation; which crowded out not only passion but the hope of it.

"If there is a next time," he said. "If we aren't all dead first."

Leeani's eyes registered pain. Her lip trembled; then she turned and, re-entering the muck, again started toward the hutside. He watched her — the lean buttocks, snaking tail. Then followed.

The terror was over. The feeding was over. The mudbeasts closed huge-pupiled eyes, sank with a huff to the bottom of their wallows. Time for sleep. According to the Knowledge, the muck was an eternal enemy. But also comforter: cool and calm. They were safe, now. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

air went silently in and out of their breathing trumpets. They slept.

They plodded forward single-file and in silence. He was filled with resentment. Lately, it seemed, whenever he felt any emotion save anguish, he remembered Chola lying feverish back at the hut, and the emotion became transformed into remorse. His ability to lead *was* slipping away. Even his physical strength: back home on Styele he could carry an adult paledoe like a farmer carrying a sheaf of grain. Now he could barely hoist a mudbeast onto his shoulders, and even a short hike made his legs ache. The other hunters, he knew, respected his hunting prowess — though they refused to admit it, and though they hated him for mating with Chola, a Terran. But although he struggled to maintain an appearance of strength — single-handedly wrestling the mudbeast, single-handedly bringing it back — it was only a matter of time before he would have to quit leading the hunt, before he would have to quit hunting altogether.

Because he too had the sickness. The sickness that had already killed twenty. That, Chola had said, would kill them all.

Once, the group had numbered over one hundred: all insurrectionists, all exiled from Styele by the Terrans and the traitor Kooba. Once, they had considered Swamp a paradise: here, stranded without provisions or tools, they had had to rely solely on their hunting ability. And the mudbeasts made worthy game, surfacing only for a short time at night, trumpeting as they gorged on the reddish mushrooms growing half-hidden among the spongeleaf roots. Trumpeting a different sound when the hunters lassoed their breathing trumpets and the spears pierced their leathery skin.

After a year, though, the sickness came. Nassam had sensed something was wrong: the women were barren, and the hunt tenders complained of dizzy spells, of a strange aching in the limbs. Yet on the night that Pleena had suddenly waddled from the fireside and collapsed onto his knees, vomiting, the nightbreeze fluttering the glittersilks he insisted on wearing in spite of the heat, Nassam had laughed until he nearly cried. "Fat old Pleena! Gets drunk on boiled swamp water!"

Five weeks later, his skin soot-black, Pleena had died, a final bubble of blood forming on his lips.

Two others were also ill.

That afternoon Chola had taken Nassam's hand, led him out of the hut. They had been living on one of the numerous buttes that rose like giant molars above the swamp foliage; in the hot sunlight of the blue-white sun Chola's face

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had appeared startlingly angular. She gazed wordlessly at Nassam, then slumped onto a nearby log. "I think ... I think it's radiation sickness," she said.

She looked up. Nassam had never heard of such an illness, but the terror in her eyes frightened him. "I've seen it before," she continued. "Years ago — back on Old Earth, during the Demurai Conflict."

Then, her gaze hardening, "I warned you, Nassam. And you just scoffed! We're not exiles. We're guinea pigs!"

Nassam had lowered his eyes, fighting anger, his fists clenching and unclenching. But he knew she was right. Taken with the hunting, the virgin swamp, the idea of ruling an entire world, he had ignored her earlier warnings about the gleam in Kooba's eyes at liftoff being a look not of victory but vengeance. This planetary system, Chola had overheard someone say during Nassam's sentencing, was unique in the known galaxy: some sort of scientific curiosity. She had been unable to find out what.

"If only we knew where the radiation is coming from," she said. "Then maybe we could do something." For a moment she was silent, her breathing choppy. She was a beautiful woman, with thick muscular shoulders and a broad nose, yet she had seemed helplessly fragile. "What are we going to do, Nassam?" she had said, in a small voice.

Not knowing what to say, feeling useless, he had said nothing. All the knowledge he possessed — the feel of a spear's power, the *thoop* an arrow makes when it pierces the neck of a paledoe, the way a stone-knife rips a bograt's neck, leaving the animal quivering on the hut floor — all had seemed just a fistful of mud squeezing through his fingers.

And now, stumbling along behind Leeani, unable to catch his breath and too proud to ask her to slow down, he again felt that uselessness. Why not tell the others of his sickness and stay behind with Chola? Why kill himself by bringing in the mudbeast, when everyone was entitled to an equal share? His emotions muddled, the ache in his legs rising into his chest, he squinted upward. The tree trunks wavered before him, skinny and yellowish. Like bars on a cage, he thought.

Had things been different back home on Styele — that is, had they remained as they once were — he would have married a Styelite woman, one of his sisters perhaps, and would be lying half-asleep on the pillows in his turret room, after a night of hunting sabercats and bloodbeasts. His flesh would be agleam with oil, the tuft of hair on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his tail neatly brushed. His fingers would be curled around the neck of a vessel filled with *loque* (his lips and chin stained red); his psi would be linked with those of his children — so he could experience their lives vicariously. Psi-linkage was a legacy from his people's nomadic days; when practiced with one's children, Nassam's father had told him, it became a pleasure more satisfying than hunting or coupling. Chola called it telempathy — a receiving of emotions (but not thoughts), a communication developed within a time when families might become separated during a hunt, and a cry for help would be lost beneath Styele's plains-winds.

Like most Styelites, Nassam had experienced psi-linkage many times. But never with children. Chola had insisted they wait until Kooba was defeated; then she would give Nassam what he longed for, what no man in the City of the Golden Shield had possessed: children with lithe Styelite bodies and quick Terran minds. Children through whom he would enjoy psi-lives not only of hunting and coupling and *loque* stupor, but also of mathematics, writing, the mysterious thought-process Terrans called logic.

Now he knew he would never experience such a linkage.

He trudged onward. The muck smelled stagnant, and he thought of Styele, and old dreams.

Why do they hunt us? a youngling asked. His mind-speak floated through the swamp, interrupting sleep. But the Great One, though awakened, did not answer. In the muck, the cool muck, she quietly lolled, heavy with unborn. In a hundred wallows her children were sleeping. And could they but wait out the nights of terror, they would be forever safe. The tailed hunters who stalked her children would all die. During the height of slaughter the hunters' minds would sometimes open like those of true beings. Then, behind the blood-lust she would see their fear, for they did not understand the Knowledge — the swamp's secrets. Nor would she tell them; not even for promises. The hunting might cease, yet the threat would remain. Better this way. Some of her children would be taken from her, but soon the tailed ones would be taken by death, and then she and hers would once more feed in peace. The thought made her happy. She rose to the top of the muck and, after sucking air into her trumpet, gleefully bawled.

In the distance a mudbeast sounded, a moaning that drifted through the tree trunks. Nassam wheeled, a familiar urgency alive within him. He stifled it. No sense searching for the animal. Even if they could find the wallow, by the time they threaded through the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

muck and tree trunks, the mudbeast would be submerged for the day. Only the fleshy trumpet extending from the top of the head to a couple of centimeters above the muck would belie the animal's existence. And that trumpet would be impossible to spot in the swamp.

Once, seated by the fireside and holding a chunk of meat, Chola had said that except for the tentacle-like appendages a mudbeast looked like a baby manatee wearing a tulip. But unable to picture the images she was using, Nassam could only visualize what the animal looked like in reality. Still, when making the comparison, Chola had grinned, her mouth showing black where her front tooth was missing, and now the remembrance of her happiness made Nassam smile.

A voice shattered his reverie. "Should I get the others, and we'll go after it?" Leeani's eyes danced with excitement. "Sounds like a big one. Must be late getting to bed."

"You know as well as I it would be a waste of time."

She pouted. "Sometimes you sound like a Terran."

Anger welled within him. But there was no malice in her eyes. She did not recognize her own bigotry.

Calming himself, he touched her shoulder gently, trying to reassure her that he forgave her such prejudices — though he knew she would think his touch merely to be condescension toward her childlike excitement about hunting the mudbeast.

They moved off together; the muck was deep here, and he walked increasingly bent-backed. The throbbing in his legs and chest grew stronger. He was breathing in short harsh gulps.

He stumbled; she put her hand against the small of his back to steady him. "You seem especially tired this morning."

"It's been a long hunt."

"My mate keeps telling me we should stay close to the huts, hunt bograts ... harvest mushrooms."

"And what do you say?" His eyes burning with sweat; he squinted against the pain.

"I say he has been tending the hut too long."

"Perhaps."

She frowned. "One hunts for more than just food, Nassam." It was an adage he had not heard in years, and for the first time he realized it was not entirely truthful. Then she added, "His heart is full of self-pity ... about losing Styele, I mean."

"Sometimes I feel that way myself."

"At least here the hunting is true," she said. "After the Terrans killed off the bloodbeasts, the rigtail would come scooting through the grain by the thousands.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You remember how their eyes would glisten? It got so I would just sit down where a field was being sickled, brace the greatbow with my feet, and let the arrow fly. I didn't even aim.

"And the paledoe. Oh, the paledoe!"

He ceased to listen. She was wrong about the Terrans — though maybe things had been different over in Aptoli, beyond the mountains. But outside *his* home city, the City of the Golden Shield, the hunting had gone bad long before the Terrans had begun building the commo station. Long, in fact, before the Terrans had landed on Styele at all. There had been no mass true-beast killings. The Terrans' arrival had merely accelerated a process that had been going on for centuries: the takeover of land and of the Huntcouncil by the farmers.

"Then my children began shunning the old ways," she was saying. "My youngest son was the first. Burned his greatbow and scattered the ashes across the turret room floor. But with that kind of hunting, who could blame him? He even refused me psi-life. Said it was an invasion of privacy. Can you believe such a thing, Nassam?"

"At least back home you could have children."

They continued on in silence. Now he could glimspe the bottom edge of the nearest hut, a meter above the swamp floor. The muck was nearly to his crotch and was intensely white — a coloration, Chola had told him, apparently due to some substance similar to what she called boric acid. The mudbeast felt very heavy. Each footfall was a struggle.

Again she closed her eyes, let the muck enfold her. Cool and soft it was, quiet and secure as the unborn within her. Elsewhere in the swamp, she knew, were other Great Ones — though beyond the range of her mind-speak. Yet once the mudbeasts had been one family, and not of the swamp, from which the Knowledge promised deliverance. But she did not want to be delivered from the swamp, from the muck's cool darkness. Only from the hunters.

II

The hut was lit only by a fire bowl and stank of vomit. Chola had moved her bed of safagrass from her usual place beside the door; now she lay along the far wall, staring into darkness. Nassam crossed the room and knelt.

Her cheeks, pockmarked since adolescence, were sunken; she looked up at him through eyes that seemed to float within her skull. Her scalp, which during coupling he used to caress with his tongue, was scaly, and beginning to black-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

en; he wished she still had her long black hair.

"Did you bring meat?"

"They're cutting off the outer fat now."

"You were gone a long time. You must be hungry."

Her concern embarrassed him, made him recall his earlier desire, however fleeting, for Leeani. He glanced away, toward the log wall. Such a woman! Even though sick, Chola put his needs before her own. Were their places reversed, he knew he would think of no one but himself. But she seemed to accept the approach of death as nothing more than the shadows quivering beyond the fire bowl; except for brief instances when confusion or frustration — not fear — could reduce her to tears, she was, he had long ago decided, the stronger of them. Yet he was deigned protector.

He took her hand in his, sat back on his haunches. She started to speak, she did not speak. Her eyes were full of tenderness. He faintly smiled. How very much she had given up for him — for his race! She loved the Stylite hunters, she had told him on their mating night, because of their physical beauty. Because they reminded her of half-naked ancestors who once had hunted the forests of Old Earth. Ancestors who were to her greater than gods, being kinsmen.

I've been thinking," she said finally. "About the sickness."

"Please. Don't talk. About that." His voice was hoarse, almost a cough.

"I think we should move the huts," she said, ignoring him.

"Move the huts?"

"Yes. Deeper into the swamp. It's worth a try, anyway."

A dull pain ran the length of his tail. He remembered the other moves: standing sometimes chest-deep in the muck, trying to lash the logs together.

Before the first move, Chola had stood near the edge of the butte; simply, cordially, as objectively as possible she had tried explaining both the sickness and her reasons for the move. "The butte may contain radioactive material," she had said. And later, with an emotional sweep of her arm: "At least we know life goes on within the swamp!" Below, broken only by the scattered buttes, the swamp's foliage stretched as far as the eye could see.

The Stylites had listened impassively, arms folded, eyes downcast. Finally, careful not to raise her eyes or voice — and thus dignify her opponent's arguments — Leeani had said, "What do you know of swamp life, Terran woman? You're too night-blind even to hunt bograts. True, some of us love the swamp ... but for hunting,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not to live there. Do you find it hot up here? Do you find the air so water-filled you can barely take a breath? Try breathing down in the swamp sometime.

"Besides, maybe the sickness of which you speak simply does not affect the swamp creatures."

In the end, though, even Leeani had acquiesced. Acquiesced because Nassam had asked them to. And because, in the face of a sickness that made even the hardiest scream with pain and sometimes brought tears of blood to the eyes, any action was better than none.

In the swamp, the number of deaths had declined: not counting Ko and Matla-Opeck, who had been carried down on makeshift stretchers, only six had died within two years — compared to a dozen the year before. Moreover, the rate with which the sickness progressed had lessened dramatically. Watablu had lasted fourteen months. And, after five months, Chola was healthier than Pleena had been after two weeks.

They had moved twice more. Optimistic from their initial success against the radiation, Chola had convinced the others that the radiation could only be weaker the further they moved from the butte.

However, the death and sickness-progress rates had remained constant.

"They'll never consent to another move," Nassam said, squinting against the hut's wavery darkness.

Chola raised onto her elbow, her smile turned to angry disbelief. "Of course not! One or two setbacks, and your people just give up. Most of you don't even seem to care about dying. You just go off and hunt until you drop!"

He gazed downward. There was silence. Then, gripping his arm and pulling herself close to him, she looked up with pleading eyes. "You've got to make them listen to me," she said. "We've got to keep trying." Twisting at the waist and reaching into the shadows beyond the head of the bed, she drew out a spongeleaf. Shiny on the bottom and coarsely pitted on the top, three times the size and twice the thickness of her hand, it looked like an engorged green tongue. "Look at this," she said. She sliced her fingernail across the leaf; transparent liquid oozed out.

She wetted her finger, held it towards his lips. "Taste it." He did — grimaced slightly, then again tasted. *Water.* Bitter, but still water.

"We've been living down here in the swamp all this time," she said, "and until ... until now that I've been bedridden I've never really noticed how strange these leaves are. My training is in inor-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ganic chemistry, not botany, but I know that such thick, succulent plants are normally associated with deserts — not with a tropical climate like we have here. And yet, except for the buttes, the plant covers this entire area. For all we know, it may cover the whole damn planet."

She paused, then went on. "I'll admit that when we first moved down here I was afraid Leeani was right — that the animals are simply immune to the radiation. Perhaps they are; I don't know. There's really no way to tell.

"But I do know that something down here must be blocking the radiation. If we were still living above the swamp, I'd be dead by now. I'm not sure if the radiation is from the butte, the sun, or wherever — but *something* down here is reducing the intensity. It's not a matter of distance; we know that from the second and third moves.

"All I can think that might be doing it," she said, shaking her head in amazement, "is this crazy plant." Nassam took the leaf and, holding the stem carefully between his thumb and forefinger, turned the plant slowly, staring.

He frowned. Whenever she talked about radiation he became confused. Hadn't she told him that only a shield of lead twenty centimeters thick could stop the things called gamma and cobalt rays?

If only he could *see* this radiation thing she spoke of. But how could one defend against something that was, as she said, "in the air"? Would radiation fall before a spear? Could he wrestle it down, hugging it between his knees like a mudbeast until the others killed it? Could he drive it out like he had sicknesses back home, with hot salt-baths and the burning of janfur leaves? She had said no.

The whole thing was like a witchcraft. And he was no magician.

"This plant, then, has been helping us?"

She glanced at it; then frustration and despair suddenly moved across her features — a tightening of facial muscles, a sudden cold terror in the eyes. "I don't know," she said, her voice quavering. "The whole idea doesn't make any sense." Her gaze jerked toward him. That he did not consider her hypothesis absurd — that he understood her reasoning at all — seemed to lighten her despair. "Find a place where the overhead foliage is extremely dense," she said.

Looking at the leaf, he wondered if he should tell her that, to his knowledge, the foliage was as dense here as anywhere. In many places, in fact, the foliage was less dense, and the sunlight was a silvery haze breaking through the leaves. There,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the hunting had been poor — unlike here in semidarkness, where mudbeasts were plentiful.

Besides, the foliage's density was only half the problem. "Even if I could find such a place," he said, "I doubt the others would move. After the futility of the last two moves, they would require proof that your idea is right."

"Proof, when they're dying?"

"Even with proof they might not move. They would know the idea was yours. They might not trust the proof."

"Because I'm Terran." There was a look in her eyes which Nassam knew was not hatred but was akin to it.

"Because you were wrong twice before. And, yes ... because you're Terran."

Her look became a glare. "Your people and their petty vendetta! What am I, the epitome of the Terran race? All I ever did in the Terran army was drive a damn jeep! Haven't I been through enough for your people? Wasn't I in the front lines when we went up against Kooba's bologuns? Wasn't it me who fell on my knees during your trial, pleading for exile for you when Kooba wanted you quartered alive? You and the others wouldn't even look at me while I humbled myself in the dust ... not even when Kooba stood and laughed and called me a hunter's whore.

"And now look at me, Nassam!" She peered directly into his eyes. "If nothing else, doesn't the fact that I have radiation sickness make me a part of this ... this *community*? Haven't I earned the right to have my opinions taken seriously?"

She lay back, breathing through her nose, fighting for self-control. "Find a dense place and make the others move there, Nassam. Don't even move the huts; just build something temporary.

"Talk to the others. Convince them to do *something*; don't just wait for the end. They'll listen to you. You're a good leader; they admire you for that. I know *I* do. That's why I married you."

"You mated with me because I was leader?" He had always assumed she loved him for his hunting ability, for his independence.

"I married you because I thought you would beat Kooba." There was shame in her voice, and — due, Nassam knew, to her despair — a certain need to hurt him. "I wanted to be queen."

He left her, then; he would not listen to such cold, sadistic rage. Outside, curled in a fetal ball at the far end of one of the gangways, Leeani was sleeping. Nassam glanced back towards Chola's hut, then lay down on the logs.

He decided that, come evening, he and Leeani would hunt the big

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mudbeast they had heard earlier. If empty-handed the next morning, then he would search for a dense-foliage place, no matter how futile the effort. He would do that much, anyway.

III

Within her, love moved: the stirring of unborn. Coddled by muck, the Great One awoke to nightfall and hunger, her mind adream with the Knowledge passed down by two-score generations of Great Ones before her, Knowledge she both understood and feared. Of stars and starships the Knowledge spoke, of neutrons and the muck. But also of deliverance — which could only mean loss of her swamp-life. For a moment she closed her mind to both the Knowledge and the hunger. She dared not feed; there might be hunters. Her hearing was poor, and lately the tailed ones had become such stealthy, cunning creatures. Then again, love moved. Eat she must. Surrendering not fear but the freedom to fear in safety, she rose to the wallow's surface and tilted her head, listening as best she could. Once she began feeding, she would have difficulty breathing, and the resultant trumpeting would fill the swamp. But now, only the screech-bugs punctured the swamp's quiet. She moved to the edge of the wallow and, finding a cluster of mushrooms among the spongeleaf roots, began to gorge.

According to his reckoning, they were getting close to where the trumpeting had come from the morning before. They plodded forward slowly — Nassam carrying a spear, Leeani a rope, shortbow and quiver.

"If your woman thinks we will move again," Leeani was saying in a carefully controlled whisper, "then the sickness has rotted her mind. Don't listen to her, Nassam; certainly don't tell the others. Those of us who fought alongside you said we would follow you to the ends of the worlds, and you know a true Styelite never breaks his word. But some are claiming that since we've changed worlds, the allegiance no longer exists."

"I only said I might look for a dense-foliage place. I just want to make her happy. I never said I would take her seriously."

"But you will, Nassam. I know you will; you always have. You're no longer the man you were at your trial — able to face death impassively."

Suddenly the trumpeting began. At first the sound seemed to lack origin, as if the elements of the swamp — the muck, the spongeleaf, the humid darkness — had conspired to orchestrate a music uniquely their own. Then the sound's origin became evident —

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

apparently from beyond the copse of spongeleaf trunks just ahead. Nassam motioned for Leeani to go around; he would squeeze between the trunks.

The trunks were so close together he had to move sideways, and he instantly felt caged. The air was hot and heavy; he could not swallow. The pain in his legs and chest had returned.

He pushed on, each footfall seeming thunderous. Hanging moss brushed his face. He pushed it aside, then he could see the wallow — and then the mudbeast: a mound of flesh three times larger than any mudbeast they had taken before, its head looking like a sack of grain left in a barren field.

Nassam sucked a deep breath, licked his lips, crept toward the tree trunk nearest the animal. Blood pounded in his ears; the spear felt slick. The mudbeast was only two meters away, its breathing pulsing through the wallow, the trumpet lying flaccid down the side of its head.

Now the animal began to move away. Nassam could not wait for Leeani to sneak up from the opposite shore. Tensing, he inched around the trunk, finding toeholds among the twining spongeleaf roots. He kept his eyes on the mudbeast's neck, where the flesh wrinkled into folds. Then, the muscles in his belly and tail tightening, he lifted his spear — and soundlessly leaped.

She did not hear the hunter, yet was instinctively turning toward the middle of the wallow when the weight pounced onto her back. Limbs weaving beneath her, she shifted suddenly toward the shoreline, rolling sideways. And then the weight was gone.

Thrown from the mudbeast, he landed with his back against spongeleaf roots, his arms flung open and the spear still uplifted. Muck sloshed over his face. He came up immediately, sputtering.

Directly above him was the wall of gray flesh. The mudbeast shifted again, trying to bury him. Nassam thrusted upward with his spear, but his legs were pinned beneath the animal, and the thrust lacked power. Then he was under for a second time. Muck filled his mouth. His free hand clutched at the animal's side, at roots, at the muck. He psi-called to Leeani.

Then he broke surface again. Gripping the spear with both hands, he heaved upward with all his strength as he again fell backward.

An agonized bellow filled the air. The animal shuddered and listed to the right. Nassam rolled clear; be was just reaching up for the spear — still in the mudbeast's side — when the weight again rolled toward him. Caught against

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the base of a spongeleaf trunk, the spear suspended the animal's weight for an instant, then bowed — and snapped.

Fighting the muck, his nails clawing for a hold on the mudbeast's side, Nassam kicked free of the swamp and scrambled onto the animal's back, the broken spear in his hand. His psi was still open, and he could feel Leeani fighting through the last line of trunks on the opposite shore.

Again the mudbeast rolled. But Nassam was not above the roll, and he clung on, straddling the neck, arms around the base of the breathing trumpet and knees pinching inward.

Suddenly the mudbeast changed direction, now plowing toward the middle of the wallow. Arching his back, Nassam reared back on the breathing trumpet; if the mudbeast managed to bury its head in the muck, he would not be able to stop it from submerging altogether.

Straining, eyes bulging, her side aflame with pain and the hunter's strangle hold cutting her wind, she struggled against both the hunter and the paralyzing fear that lay along the fringes of her mind. Again and again she thrashed, bellowing, slapping her head against the muck. Still the hunter held on. And slowly the fear swept over her — a fear originating in the depths of her womb. It seized her mind, and though she continued to move from side to side, the efforts became mechanical. "Kill me not, hunter," her mind-speak cried out. "Kill me not!"

Nassam had just leaned over the animal's head and was ready to plunge the spear end into the eye when he sensed the mudbeast's wail. For a moment he thought Leeani was psi-calling; he peered toward the far shore, the spongeleaf trunks vaporous in his night-vision. Then, realizing the source, he remembered childhood tales of wise hunters who could communicate with animals. Perhaps this was what the tales had meant.

Again the emotion passed through him — more vivid this time. The animal ceased moving, its heartbeat thudding through Nassam's loins. He slackened his grip on the trumpet and concentrated, opening his psi, his eyes closed.

Mental pictures began to form — slowly, then faster, now a whirlwind. At first they frightened him; this was a psi-experience unlike anything he had known before. His brain was filled with a chaos of images; his forehead furrowing, he struggled to sort them out.

By degrees the images became scenes, and he relived memories he had wanted to forget: of himself squatting within a darkened hut,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his voice uplifted in lament at Watablu's death. Of muck merging over the bodies of Ko and Matla-Opeck as they were lowered into a wallow, their spears strapped to their chests and their faces powdered.

Then he witnessed something which initially he did not understand. He and the other exiles were standing along the edge of the wallow, silently watching the mudbeasts feed in peace. Chola was among the group, and Bikop and Sti — their skin healthily tan.

And slowly Nassam sensed what the mudbeast was trying to tell him; promise that neither he nor the others would hunt the mudbeasts, and the animal would tell him how to survive the sickness.

For a moment he thought it impossible that he could ever make such a promise. He remembered the day he had quit hunting back on Styele: a herd of paledoe had come out of the grainfield, running-leaping toward him as though consciously wanting an arrow. Disgusted, he had laid his greatbow down on a large rock and, tears in his eyes, had resolved to kill the farmer-king, Kooba.

But then he also remembered: a dust cloud rolling out of the reddish-gold Styelite sun — a gyro jeep passengered by three survey men and driven by a woman, lumbering through the grain and up the rise to the City of the Golden Shield; the woman driving with arms held stiffly, elbows locked and hair flying, her silver-foil suit catching and losing the sunlight. Her bemused smile when she looked at the small, ancient shield on the city gate, the shield's paint chipped and the wood showing through. Her childish giggling, when on their mating night she told him her tribe had been called Blackfoot, and he had glanced down her legs. Her voice, soft and husky, when she again had assured him that, yes, their races could produce children; and then her fingertips touching his tail — gingerly, like a virgin bride exploring her husband for the first time.

Had he loved her then? Probably. Though at the time he had told himself he was coupling with her strictly for children. Did he love her now? Yes. But did he love her enough?

Or did he just fear her, fear death? Not only her death, but his own?

He promised, mentally visualizing each of the exiles breaking his or her spear in turn. Then the memories fell away, his psi now an unstained cloud wafting within himself; then again he could feel the pulse and images of the mudbeast's telepathy. He felt himself drawn into the animal's womb; then he was an adult mudbeast

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

foraging for mushrooms; then again within the womb — passing backward twenty mudbeast generations, his tentacle-limbs becoming stronger and his revulsion of the swamp greater, until finally he discovered himself half-asleep and warmly comfortable within a glass hemisphere in a starship. They were approaching the furthest planets of a solar system; he and the other mudbeasts must wake fully, control with their combined wills and the wall of blinking lights.

Then he was again Nassam son of Longur, great-great grandson of Goldenshield; he was astraddle a mudbeast in the middle of a wallow; and now he saw himself — no longer encapsulated in either a starship or hemisphere — shooting naked through space, spear in hand. He imagined a sun, the Styelite sun, and nearing it he lost the spear but not the velocity — diving headlong into the gaseous swirls, sinking, pulled ever downward, squeezed by incredible pressure and burned black by the heat, his body now curled into a ball, somersaulting, and now disintegrating molecule by molecule. One with the sun, he witnessed the fusion process of its innermost furnaces, the searing cohesion of atoms. Many particles — some of which Nassam saw as a neutral white — would tear away from that cohesion; colliding, zigzagging, colliding, the neutral particles would stream toward the sun's surface, never to reach it.

Then Nassam again felt himself launched into space, this time entering the sun over Swamp: a blue-white ball symbolically set apart from the rest of the galaxy. Here the core was hotter; so hot that the fusion occurred not only in the interior but also close to the surface. Neutral particles from the surface fusion rained out into space, decaying as they traveled toward Swamp. Of those reaching the planet, many could not penetrate the atmosphere; relatively few particles penetrated the sponge-leaves.

None got through the top layer of the muck. To survive, the exiles had only to burrow.

Emotionally drained, Nassam kicked his leg over the neck of the mudbeast and, poised for a second on the animal's back, jumped toward shore, landing with a sloppy splash and then trudging up to firmer ground. Though not completely understanding what he had just seen, he intuited that the mudbeast had shown him the truth, and he knew Chola would understand what he did not. He also knew he could convince the others that to survive they would have to live like mudbeasts or bograts; should they not believe him, he would bring them here.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Still, he felt cheated. Not because he had lost twenty friends while the answer lay so simply before him, but because he would have to give up hunting.

Leaning against a spongeleaf trunk, he gazed vacantly toward the mudbeast, wishing he had not made the promise. The more he thought about the promise, the faster his mind began to turn. An idea sparked within him, caught fire. He slyly smiled. By burrowing, he thought, we will survive the sickness; perhaps the sterility will also pass.

And he had never promised that the exiles' children would not hunt. He and the other adults would hunt vicariously.

He began to laugh — head thrown back, mouth open, chiseled upper teeth touching his lower lip. But then he saw Leeani standing waist-deep in the wallow, just now raising her bow, and the laugh died in his throat. His psi shrieked.

Too late. The arrow struck the mudbeast in the right eye. The animal moaned — not a bellow, as earlier — listed and, its head flopped awkwardly sideways and blackish pus oozing down the side of its face — began to slowly sink.

"Grab the trumpet!" Leeani called, hands cupped at her mouth. "Keep its head up!"

Nassam took a step forward, then stopped. Merely keep the animal afloat, and he would bring home not only the swamp's secret but also the largest mudbeast ever taken. Awed by the prize, the others would believe him — would follow him.

And why shouldn't he bring it back? The beast was obviously dying; better to feed eighty Styelites than to rot in the swamp. Was it his fault that the promise had been broken? Had it, in fact, been broken at all? Did the promise really exist when he had not had enough time to tell the others?

Still, he felt bound. The animal's head was now completely submerged and, as the rest of the body began to sink, Nassam knew a part of himself was being pulled into the wallow's depths.

There was a sucking noise, a slight whirlpooling of the muck; then the mudbeast was gone. The first rays of sunlight were filtering through the spongeleaves; the tree trunks surrounding the wallow seemed to lean inward. Nassam glanced toward Leeani; she was standing slump-shouldered, short-bow in hand, watching helplessly as her hunt partner allowed the enormous animal to slip away forever. Nassam pitied her.

He would never, he realized, hunt the mudbeasts again. And he would try to keep the others from doing so. He hoped they would follow his example and live beneath

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the muck, but it no longer mattered to him whether he remained their leader. Nothing mattered except that he go on living. Living not for hunting or children, not for pleasure or dreams. But for love. That was enough — merely to live: for himself, for Chola.

The muck, the cool muck, enfolded her. Her side no longer hurt; her eye only lightly throbbed. She struggled to expell the unborn from her womb. But then, knowing the futility of trying to force younglings into the world before they are ready to enter, she had only her sorrow — and her hope. Reading the hunter's mind as she sank beneath the surface, she had seen that his blood-lust was gone. Perhaps hers would be the last slaughter. Yet she feared the worst: feared the deliverance the Knowledge promised was not deliverance from the swamp — as she had thought — but from life itself. Someday, perhaps, only the hunter's descendants would people the wallows. Descendants whom — because of their forefathers' initial exposure to the neutron radiation — the swamp would gradually change, as it had done to her race. Their limbs would atrophy, they would come to consider the swamp as home. Dying, she tried to content herself with that belief; she tried to hate. But she could not hate; and then her mind-speak, filled with good-bys and love, went out to her children. Her body spasmed, and she gave herself up to the swamp.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Readers who have been with us for a few years will surely recall Gary Jennings' "Sooner Or Later Or Never Never" (May 1972) about the incredible adventures of the Rev. Crispen Mobey in the Australian outback. Mobey, who might be described as the Inspector Clouseau of the ecclesiastic world, here sets off into Deep Space with, as might be expected, Earth-shaking results.

Not With A Bang But A Bleep

by GARY JENNINGS

VIA COMLASER TO:
Col. John B. Obnox
USAF Chaplain
NASA Central Control
Houston, TX, U.S.A.
Planet: Earth
System: Solar
Galaxy: Milky Way
The Universe

Esteemed Reverend Colonel Obnox:

Surprise! And greetings from the once Mars-bound spaceship *Corrigan,* which by now all of you on Earth must have given up for lost. This is your protégé, the Rev. 2nd Lt. Crispin Mobey, at the transmitter.

Have I got news for you, sir! For the world! For all mankind!!!

But I must restrain my enthusiasm and postpone my revelation, simply in order to make this a coherent report, for I am comlasering this message to Earth at the Captain's request and —

"At the Captain's bleeping *command,* God bleep it!" That is the Captain interpolating, from behind my shoulder at the comconsole. I will not sully the laser beam with his language verbatim. As 3V used to do on Earth, I will bleep his more offensive utterances. Now he has turned away, to the Sip--a-Nip tubes, where he lately spends much of his time, and has turned over to me the responsibility and privilege of reporting the extraordinary voyage of the *Corrigan.*

I should immediately explain why you have received no messages from this craft since shortly after our blastoff. It appears that we very soon attained a speed faster than that of light, so all the frantic comlaser messages which *were* sent merely trailed along behind us like an impalpable kite tail. Now, however, we are once more aimed toward Earth and have again attained the approximate speed of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

light, so our comlaser blips should be preceding us "like machine gun bullets from an old-time strafing plane," as the Captain put it in nontechnical terms. I do not much like the metaphor of strafing my beloved old Earth, but —

"Why the bleep not?" Here's the Captain again, ranting as he reads my printout. "Earth ought to be bleeping well prepared for *anything* from Crispinhead Mobey by now!" And he stomps away.

I am addressing this message to you, Rev. Col. Obnox — and will continue as if speaking to you personally — simply because you were the far-sighted visionary who recruited me for this assignment. But, alas, I fear you are long dead, sir, and this communiquē is probably being received by a reverend replacement generations after your time.

The Captain has tried, in his brusque way, to explain to me the difference between the passage of time here on the *Corrigan* and that on dear old Earth. We were never instructed to travel at the unprecedented speed we have attained, nor were we expected to. At our velocity, according to the Captain, while time marches on normally here aboard ship, the clocks and calendars on Earth have been, by comparison, absolutely galloping. The Captain had to put this very simplistically for me to comprehend, and, as well as I can understand, it is all the doing of the late Professor Einstein. We are likely to land among incredulous hordes of our own great-great-great-etc.-grandchildren, who will have no history or recollection of the *Corrigan's* mission — and on an Earth which we voyagers through time as well as space may scarcely recognize.

"If there's still a bleeping Earth for us to land on!" The Captain again, with a hiccup.

I have never married, so of course I shan't have to introduce myself to a gaggle of doting great-etc.-grandchildren. I mention these things merely to preface my remarks to Whomever They May Concern. That is, to whatever Chaplain has replaced you, Rev. Col. Obnox, at your pulpit-console. Since he (you) (whoever) may never have heard of the *Corrigan*, nor of its intended but misplaced destination, nor of this Crispin Mobey so suddenly and startlingly comlasering from out of Deep Space, it behooves me to backtrack a bit before our big bird's blastoff, in order to make our subsequent mishaps and goodhaps understandable. Inasmuch as the Captain appears determined to lay the *blame* (his word, not mine) on me — and even mutters of having me Court-Martialed, along with himself, if his liver lasts to Earth — I had best begin by recounting what led up to my fortui-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tous presence aboard the good ship *Corrigan.*

I modestly submit that it was fitting that I should be the first ordained Chaplain ever assigned to a spacecrew. My whole life, since my matriculation at the Southern Primitive Protestant College of Divinity in Grobian, Virginia, has been spent in the service of the venerable SoPrim Protestant Church. For example, immediately upon graduation from the seminary, I was assigned to convert to SoPrim Christianity a heathen tribe in the so-called Never-Never Land of the Australian Outback. Some of my critical colleagues have claimed that my handling of that venture set both Christianity and the noble missionary profession back by fifty years. But I defy any carper to show me a single Australian aborigine who still dares to observe the heathen rituals and superstitions I was sent to discourage.

Then, after a well-earned sabbatical, I was assigned by the SoPrim Missionary Board as spiritual adviser to a UN peace-keeping team (UNPEEK) dispatched to the tiny nation of Oblivia in South America. Long riven by a politically motivated civil war, Oblivia had but recently subsided into a sort of exhausted pacification. I regret to report that my well-meant efforts there reignited the conflict — this time into the bloodiest religious war since the Crusades. After I and the unoffending UNPEEK people had been ignominiously expelled, Oblivia resigned from the UN, seceded from both South America and the Western Hemisphere and, last I heard, was still being ravaged by religious strife. Some have said, "On Mobey's head be it." But I direct your attention to the fact that there has never again been a *political* war in that country. Ever since my timely intercession, Oblivia's civil wars have been all *religious.*

For a while, however, I was disheartened by that (as it seemed to me then) failed experiment. I applied to the SoPrim Elders for a leave of absence, which they almost eagerly granted. Like a wounded animal seeking its den, I crept away to the land from which my ancestors had emigrated to Virginia in colonial days. We Mobeys — you can look it up — originally hailed from the rather gothically gloomy English county of Transylvanshire. No sooner had I arrived there than I discovered that, in the most infantile fairy-tale tradition, I was the long-lost (or, rather, never-suspected) ward of a fairy godfather. Unfortunately, instead of receiving the three boons, or the Kingdom complete with Princess Charming, or whatever one is supposed to receive from a beneficent fairy godparent, I found myself embroiled in a series of somewhat sordid and most em-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

barrassing episodes. These frequently involved my having to bail the willowy old gentleman out of the clutches of Scotland Yard's vice squad. In the end, I had to flee England under a cloud and an alias, when the more lurid London tabloids unforgivably publicized my Transylvanian tribulations under such Gothic Black headlines as "The Unsavoury Case of the *Really* Fairy Godfather!"

But I did not intend to make my history sound like a catalogue of frustrations and failures. While I stoutly maintain, contrary to all cavil, that my every spiritual undertaking soon or later turned out for the best, I must concede that *at the time* they ill served to advance my ecclesiastic career. They did, nevertheless, not unlike the Trials of Job, serve to strengthen my piety, devotion and spirituality.

That I eventually achieved a degree of sanctitude of which I could never have dared dream was first evidenced when I inadvertently attended a pornographic cinema show under the misapprehension that I was to view an edifying documentary film on linguistics. (The movie was entitled *Mother Tongue.*) The performance was of course preceded by the playing of "The Star-Spangled Banner," and when, with the rest of the audience, I stood in homage to our National Anthem, I kept on standing. I mean to say, I stood up, then drifted right off my feet and, to the astonishment of ushers and audience, slowly levitated all the way to the dome of the auditorium, whence I could see nothing whatever of the film, which had cost me $7.50 admission, including lubricity tax.

It was at about this time that my SoPrim superiors prevailed upon me to Make a Retreat, for the good of my soul and serenity. Indeed, in my case, they decreed a solitary retreat of indefinite duration ("Don't call us...") in the farthest flung house of retirement our church owns. Obediently, and brimming with humility, I went — alone, penniless, without supplies or raiment except the clothes I stood in (my shabbiest and shiniest clerical black serge), carrying only my SoPrim-approved version of The Bible and nothing at all of worldly belongings except my spectacles.

That, Rev. Col. Obnox, was where you found me: dirty and bearded as a third-century eremite, dwelling in that derelict, one-room, adobe-and-thatch hut tucked under the oppressive cliffs of the Superstition Mountains of Arizona. When you drove up in your Heaven-blue jeep, you made a sparkling contrast to my dun-colored desert surroundings. An Air Force Chaplain, wearing on your Heaven-blue uniform both silver epaulet eagles

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and gold lapel crosses, you might have been a Christian Roman Legionnaire touring outposts of the Empire.

"Mobey, how in Heaven's name do you live out here?" was, I remember, your first remark after our handshake.

"I strive," I replied, "to emulate Elijah during his exile by the brook Cherith. Arizona is full of ravens." I snapped my fingers and a raven dutifully flapped in through my unglazed single window hole, to drop my evening meal on the bare plank table.

You stared, retched and blurted, "But the ravens brought Elijah *bread and flesh*. The Book of Kings specifically says so. That one brought you *a matzo and a worm!*"

"Well, what other sort of bread would a good Tishbite Jew like Elijah consent to eat? And what other kind of flesh would a raven know? If I could command buzzards, now..."

You regarded me — aghast, I think, and slightly nauseated — while I dined (delicately, to savor each morsel). Then you said, "That is why I've sought you out, Brother Crispin. You have been variously described as a kooky coot and a hermit miracle-worker, and the word has been told in Gath, in Askelon, yea, even unto Houston, Texas, where I have the honor to be the NASA Spiritual Consultant."

I gaped so I nearly lost my worm. "Did you say a *nasty* spiritual consultant?"

"I said NASA, confound it! America's aerospace agency, man! Astronauts and all that." I apologized for my denseness, and after a moment you added, cautiously, "I understand you even levitate at times."

"At inconvenient times," I said humbly. "The Superstition Mountains up there are teeming with nutty old prospectors digging for gold. When I come floating by, they take me for a new and literal kind of claim jumper. So far, I have suffered only minor flesh wounds."

You gazed at me again for a while, then said gravely, "If these things be true, Brother Crispin, you may be provably psychokinetic. The very kind of man I'm ordered to look for."

"Doubtless I have my quirks," I said stiffly, "but I'm as sane as you are, Colonel Obnox. If the Air Force has nothing better to do these days than scout for loonies to lock up, I can suggest a dozen trigger-happy old prosp —"

"You misunderstand, my good fellow. I mean that I take you to be a true esper."

"No," I said, smiling tolerantly at that foolishness. "No. None of your weirdo cultists. Good solid Southern Primitive Protestant, through and through. A minister

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ordained and accredited, same as you are, Reverend Colonel, sir."

You took off your heavily gold-braided, Heaven-blue hat and distractedly moved your hair around. With your hand, I mean, not the way I do.

"Can it really be?" you mumbled. "Can it be that you are so sublimely unworldly, Reverend Mobey, that you have never heard of an esper? Of ESP? of PK, short for psychokinesis? Of the emergent studies in psi and parapsychology?"

I confessed that I was lamentably untutored in those subjects. You kindly embarked on an ABC-level explanation of PK, ESP and such, though I didn't really get a full grasp until much later.

"For one example," you said, "if man is ever going to conquer interstellar space — not just the Solar System — he must find a means of moving his transport at a speed faster than light. No known fuel or power source can do it. It is popularly supposed that it positively cannot be done. But those supposers are in error. There is *one* thing in the Universe — right here on Earth, in fact — which moves far faster than light. Do you know what that is?"

"The grace of God!" I cried loyally.

"Well, that too, of course," you said, a trifle discomfited. "Forgive me if I sound like a minister of materialism only. But there is another thing capable of moving faster than the speed of light. It is thought."

I thought about thought. "I think you might be right."

"Fantasy and science-fiction writers," you continued, "have for years postulated the likelihood of a peculiarly gifted human's having the ability to propel a space vehicle by thought power alone — by PK — and at the *speed* of thought. Of course, those writers are crackpots. Splurgeon, Ozmov, McReynolds, Jenkins, all of them. But now NASA has taken the subject out of the fumbling fingers of those ink-stained wretches."

"You mean the wretches have been right all these years?"

"Oh, dear Lord, of course not!" You snorted and laughed raucously. "The wretches wrote fiction. Our scientists deal in *fact*. At NASA, they're tackling parapsychology not with notional ideas but with radio telescopes, IBM computers, electron microscopes, experts from the Rand tink-thank. I mean think-tank. I myself have seen a nineteen-volume study compiled by Rand — Top Secret, so don't let on that I leaked. Its conclusion could be summarized, for a nonexpert like yourself, as just this: *It is not impossible that a human being gifted with PK abilities could think-power a spaceship across*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

light-years of space at the incalculable speed of thought!"

"Gosh!" I said sincerely. "A veritable breakthrough of innovative scientific imagination! But how do you, sir — a man of the cloth — come into this?"

"Well," you said, again seeming a trifle disconcerted. "NASA has a pretty rigid organizational chart. You know, all those little boxes connected by little lines. Until they decide where to box parapsychology, they've temporarily tacked it onto Supernatural & Occult, and of course I head that branch."

"Of course. So you're out seeking someone with PK power?"

"I think I can safely say that *every* Developed Country in the Nuclear Family of Nations is *looking* for such a one. All very hush-hush, naturally, but we've had word of some few tentative successes here and there."

"No kidding!" I said sincerely.

"Take India. We gave them materials to build a nuclear power plant, and they used the goods to build an atomic bomb instead. But the scientists of the Vishnuclear Institute couldn't contrive an implosion device to set it off. Madame Gandhi typically lost patience. She had the imploder packed with sacred-cow dung and detonated by a guru named Ras Bheri Jhamjhar chanting mantras at it."

"Golly!" I said sincerely.

"Israel actually fired off that stage illusionist of theirs in a satellite, to see if he could influence its Earth orbit purely by PK power. He did, too — so eccentrically that he's still up there. It seems his capsule is moving in an orbit that sort of outlines the shape of a bent spoon. The Israelis are going crazy trying to compute retrofire to compensate."

"Gee whiz!" I said sincerely.

"From France comes word that some clever Jesuit is on the verge of perfecting a metal alloy for rocket nozzles so a spacecraft can be fueled with holy water. The Jesuit calls his new alloy Halleluminum."

I asked despairingly, "Does everyone else have the jump on us, then?"

"I don't think so." And you smiled beatifically, Rev. Col. Obnox. "I have a hunch that NASA's already found a PK power bigger than all those others put together."

"Can you tell me?"

"Well, technically you'll have to be cleared for Top Secret to know about this invaluable acquisition, but I believe we can anticipate your being cleared and informed in due time. It's you, Crispin Mobey."

The records of my training stay at NASA must still be on file there, no matter how much Einsteinian time has flowed over Houston, so I need not dwell on that period in detail. I was commissioned an Air Force Second Lieutenant, and I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

proudly pinned the gold silvers of my rank onto my Heaven-blue uniform. Naturally, I did not have to undergo the entire and rigorous training program of a full-fledged astronaut, since I had only one job to perform on any space flight, and could hypothetically have done that if I were welded immovably into the fuselage. I spent most of my training time learning to wear and manipulate my bulky spacesuit, with its profusion of hermetic quickzips, input and output jacks, and so forth. What gave me the most trouble were the embarrassing, intimately built-in Disproduct Bags.

When I got my first assignment, to this Mars-bound *Corrigan,* I complained at being sent to a planet named for a pagan god. But you, Rev. Col., impressed upon me the importance of my being aboard.

"Simply get the ship safely to Mars, get it safely landed and, when the survey is done, get it safely back to Earth. The ship is already programmed, of course, but we'll be monitoring every millisecond from the pulpit-console here, to see if and where and when your PK power overrides the computers. We'll be cutting them out at irregular intervals to give you a real test. And essentially that's what this is — a test of your powers. If you do well, your next assignment ought to be Command."

I asked wistfully, "Won't I have Chaplain duties besides?"

"I daresay the rest of the crew will be too busy to require much spiritual counseling. And we know from the Viking robots that you won't have to baptize or bury any Martians. No, on the outbound voyage you are simply to concentrate during every waking moment on these cube grid coordinates — the target position of Mars. Inbound, you are to concentrate on this other set of coordinates to get back to Earth. Memorize these figures, my boy. Then, after blastoff, think them, write them down, sing them if you like. Repeatedly and unceasingly. Do that, Lieutenant Mobey, *and do nothing but that.*"

At which, you presented me with two sheets of incredible strings of letters, numbers and mathematical symbols. All the rest of my time at NASA I spent reading them, rereading them, repeating them to myself. I have never been very good at arithmetic.

My assignment was so Highest Altitude Secret that I was not even introduced to the rest of the crew until we gathered at the *Corrigan's* launch pad. The Captain, a crusty former Marine Air ace, immediately bellowed, "A Chaplain, for Christ's sake!"

"Precisely," I murmured.

"A spaceship needs a bleeping Chaplain like it needs a dead albatross. What do you weigh, Mobey?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Never mind. Just multiply it by the escape-velocity factor. Then go away."

"I have my orders here, sir."

"Bleep the bleeping bleep! What do I get saddled with next? A supervisor of shuffleboard and charades from some borscht resort? Let me see those bleeping orders!"

"At ease, Captain. I am Colonel Obnox," you said, coming to my rescue. "Lieutenant Mobey's orders are sealed, and are not to be opened by you until the *Corrigan* is in free-flight trajectory."

The Captain still bleeping angrily behind me in the gantry, I stepped aboard and found my quarters — or "sleep cylinder" — where there is room only to insert my spacesuited self, my much-thumbed sheets of target coordinates and my indispensable Bible. My cylinder is situated right next to the olfactorily offensive Disproduct Jettishute into which all of us evacuate our personal Disproduct Bags.

I'll not bother to describe the rest of the crewmen, since each of them has all the dynamic and colorful personality of lint. Except for the Captain, the only forceful character is our one female crewperson, Ms. Mammal. She is listed on the roster as Ship's Dietician and is forever thrusting her helmeted head into my sleep cylinder and inquiring, "A little refreshment, duckie?" But, since our only victual is the vile Queeze (36 flavors 36, none of them duck), automatically dispensed from squirt tubes, I assume Ms. Mammal must have other duties as well. If so, they have never been explained to me, any more than has the function of one particular quickzip aperture in my spacesuit.

The countdown and blastoff were uneventful, or so I assume. Partly to prevent my PK concentration from being distracted, partly because the Captain had spitefully restricted me to quarters, I lay in my sleep cylinder, reciting and repeating and reiterating those Mars-coordinate figures. Not for me a visit to the flight deck. Not for me a look at the view screen, in admiration of the dark deeps of space and the glorious glitter of God's star-dust, and the realization that I was as close to Heaven as a mortal can get. I lay immured and kept track of the flight via the ship's intercom system. I heard the first hint of something having gone amiss when we were fewer then eight hours out of orbit pattern and into target trajectory.

CAPTAIN'S VOICE: Not receiving from Central Control? How the bleep can that be, Sparks?

SPARKS' VOICE: Bleeped if I know, sir. All systems are five-by-five, and all lights green. But reception has faded to zero-by-zero, and I suspect Central Control is not reading us either. It could be that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

we're somehow, uh, out of communications range.

CAPTAIN: Out of *range?* Eight hours from Earth? What the bleep are you talking about? NASA's still receiving from a bleep-pot probe that went up in '59, and it must be out beyond Saturn by now.

SPARKS: Well, sir, there's only one other possible explanation. You'll think I'm drunk for suggesting it, but we could be outrunning the signal.

CAPTAIN: I *hope* you're drunk, Sparks. Otherwise you're stark raving mad. Outrunning radio and radar and laser signals that travel at the speed of *light?* Until further orders, that Sip-a-Nip is off limits to all junior officers!

I returned my attention to mumbling my numbers like a Papist telling his beads and tried to stifle a small suspicion that had suddenly struck me. Could the confusion on the flight deck possibly indicate that I was *over*doing my duty? Well, I had my orders, and mine not to reason why. I went on telling my beads — I mean my coordinates — more frenetically than ever, in hope of inducing self-hypnosis or something and blotting out my growing unease. Time passed.

CAPTAIN'S VOICE: Look at that bleeping view screen! What the bleep is Canopus doing *there?* T-Square, where in the bleeping bleep are you navigating us to?

T-SQUARE'S VOICE: It's got me puzzled too, sir. I guarantee we're smack on course. The only thing is, uh, we shouldn't have reached this point on the trajectory until about four months from now.

CAPTAIN: I ordered that Sip-A-Nip off limits! Are you plastered?

T-SQUARE: No, sir. As near as I can figure it, we've been accelerating ever since we came off orbit and we're *still* accelerating. I don't know how we did it — and I don't know how to break it to you, sir — but we've somehow passed the light-constant velocity. Frankly, I'm scared bleepless. But I haven't sipped a nip.

CAPTAIN: Then Ms. Mammal's refreshments have addled your brain. *Nothing* exceeds the speed of light! Until further orders, men, Ms. Mammal is off limits too!

Now I was really worried, to the point of disobeying my strict orders. Deliberately I put aside and ceased concentrating on the coordinate sheets. That might just help set things back to rights. To keep my mind off the numbers, and to divert myself with lighter reading, I took up my trusty Bible. But the selections were not exactly inspiriting, and the intercom voices kept intruding, ever more excited and dismayed as time passed.

ISAIAH: All we like sheep have gone astray.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CAPTAIN: Where the bleep are we now, T-Square?

JUDE: These are wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

T-SQUARE: We were scheduled to take six months to touchdown, sir, but there's Mars coming up on the grid already.

II KINGS: The driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he driveth furiously.

SPARKS: I've been hoping Central Control might try bouncing a signal *back* at us off Mars, but I don't get a bleeping peep.

LUKE: For they know not what they do.

CAPTAIN: This has got to be a bad dream, and we haven't even blasted off yet. The ship's still on the pad and I'm asleep some — *On the pad!* That little mother Mopery or whatever his bleeping name is! Get me his sealed orders! Move! (Rustle of papers unfolding.) *Great Jesus Christ in the morning!*

When the Captain employed a devout ejaculation instead of his customary bleeps, I knew he must be really upset. And when he bellowed so that the intercom came unbolted from my cylinder bulkhead, *"CRISPIN MOBEY TO THE FLIGHT DECK ON THE DOUBLE!"* I knew that my nagging suspicion had been true intuition. Or maybe ESP.

"ESP, for the love of bleep!" the Captain roared at me on the flight deck. "You've been *thinking* us to Mars?"

"And to a landing, of course, yes, sir," I said meekly.

"You blithering imbecile! *A landing?* We're going to knock Mars out to the orbit of Pluto! T-Square, how much time have we got?"

"Seventeen minutes to, gulp, impact."

"Mobey," said the Captain, deadly quiet. "I can't waste any of that time in killing you with my bare hands. Business before pleasure is my motto. If you got our collective ass in this crack, you'd better bleeping well get it out again. Go back to your crucifix or your crucible or whatever and change your bleeping incantation. Think us off collision course! Think *deflection!* You've got seventeen minutes!"

"Sixteen minutes, sir," said T-Square.

I scurried back to my cylinder, as troubled as Job — "Fear came upon me, and trembling; the hair of my flesh stood up" — and riffled distractedly through my Bible. I prayed a fragment from one of the Psalms, "Hear me, for I am ready to halt," picked a page at random and stabbed a finger at it.

RUTH: Go not empty unto thy mother-in-law.

I must confess I said, "Drat!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Except for Ezekiel's flamboyant flying saucer, there is not much in the Bible about spaceships, and I couldn't recall *anything* in the way of instructions for steering one. I flipped to Job: "Who can turn him?" and to Lamentations: "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned."

CAPTAIN (from my dangling intercom): It's no longer a little red dot on the screen, it's a bleeping red *disk*, and growing fast!

PSALMS: O Lord, Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandeth my thought afar off. (*Well, Lord,* I *prayed silently, if You have understoodeth so far, please stay tuned!*)

T-SQUARE: Nine minutes. No way.

PSALMS: He shall give His angels charge over thee. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

MS. MAMMAL: It's like a cliff — the whole screen! We've had it! Farewell, all my duckies! I die a female fulfilled, a woman liberated!

MATTHEW: Deliver us from evil.

SPARKS: Wait! Look! Now it's slowly edging sideways!

EXODUS: Let my people go.

CREW CHORUS (exultantly): We're clear! There's the nightside! *We missed Mars!* Three cheers for Crispin Mobey!

CAPTAIN (grimly): The Jettishute for Crispin Mobey! Get the bleeping creep up here again.

Happily, cooler heads had prevailed by the time I crept back to the flight deck. When the Captain snarled, "What do we ram next, Mobey? Halley's Comet?" the navigator cautioned him, "You could be right, sir. We'd better keep the, uh, Lieutenant's talents on tap."

"Bleep his talents," growled the Captain, who was, so to speak, on tap himself, at the Sip-a-Nip. "Explain yourself, T-Square."

"I estimate that at least we're angled off the plane of the ecliptic, so we're not on collision course with any other planet or moon in the Solar System. But we're still accelerating, sir. We could go blundering through the planets — if any — orbiting around, say, Sirius or Alpha Centauri."

"Some navigator you are," sneered the Captain. "Wherever we're at, those two stars are in opposite directions from Mars."

"That's just it, sir," said T-Square. *"Wherever we're at.* With the speed we're making, and the evasion maneuvers, I haven't a clue."

"You've got the most complex computers NASA could buy."

"But they were programmed according to star patterns as seen from Earth and previous space flights. We're out where nobody and nothing has ever been before.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Look, sir." He indicated the view screen, showing the star-spangled black sky ahead. "Totally unfamiliar. Now look when I switch to the scopes pointing aft." T-Square punched a button and the screen went completely, unrelievedly black. "We're outrunning the light of any possibly recognizable constellations back yonder. Absolutely nothing is visible to us at this speed except those stars dead ahead. There's no way I can get a fix on our position or lay out any course to anywhere until we get back to some previously plotted point in space."

He turned to glare at me, in concert with the Captain, Ms. Mammal, Sparks, Dampers (the flight engineer) and every other crewman.

"All I have are two target-coordinates," I said helplessly. One set for Earth and one for Mars."

"And they can't be worth a bleeping bleep," said the Captain. "Your Mars figures are the coordinates for its position *six months from now*. Yet you got us to it on the button in a matter of hours. Just by thinking Mars, Mars, Mars. Now you bleeping well go and think something else."

"Yes, sir. What?"

"First and foremost, a slowdown to the *Corrigan's* normal speed."

"No, sir, excuse me, sir," said Dampers. "We're already light-hours from our home corner of the galaxy. If we slow down and turn around out here, we'll get home about the year 2,000,001."

"Unthinkable," Ms. Mammal said crisply. "We've got Queeze enough only for a maximum eighteen months."

"Well, thank God for *that,*" grunted the Captain. "I'd sooner eat the hull insulation anyway. Okay, Mobey, you know the situation now as well as any of us. *You* figure out what to pray and PK for. A dash back to Solar territory and then a slowdown. A return to normalcy. Divine intervention. You pick it. Just get us out of this bleeping bind *or I'll cram an eighteen months' supply of Queeze up your Disproduct duct!*"

You perceive my dilemma, Rev. Col. Obnox. The responsibility for saving the *Corrigan* and crew was on the slender, sloping shoulders of yours truly alone. Since I knew nothing whatever of physics, astronautics or astronomy, I decided that, of the several alternatives the Captain had mentioned, I was best fitted to PK for "divine intervention."

Thereafter I kept to my sleep cylinder, though I slept only fitfully, having often to fend off Ms. Mammal, who seemed determined that I be well nourished for my task. At least everyone else left me alone — indeed, almost superstitiously

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shunned my entire end of the ship — so I could pore assiduously over my only available space manual: my Good Book, that is to say. Every least reference which might be of assistance, I underlined and concentrated on.

I commenced by putting the blame for our plight where it belonged — even though, and forgive me, dear departed Rev. Col. Obnox, this included yourself — quoting from Paul's epistle to the Hebrews: "Truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an Heavenly city..." and adding, from the Psalms: "O Lord, when I consider Thy Heavens, the moon and the stars, what is man, that Thou art mindful of him?"

I hoped that this abject confession of mankind's overweening ambition might get me a more sympathetic hearing On High for the supplications to which I then directed all my concentration. From the Psalms: "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." And Psalms again: "The Lord preserveth the strangers." And John: "Hereafter ye shall see Heaven open." And Revelation: "Behold, a door was opened in Heaven: and the first voice which I heard said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things..."

"Get your ass up here, Mobey, and look at THIS!" came the Captain's bellow, for the first time since our near-collision with Mars.

The panoramic view screen sparkled and glowed with more stars than I had yet seen on it at one time, all now as colorful as they were bright: ruby, amethyst, sapphire, emerald. But only those straight ahead of us stayed fixed. The others rushed past on either side, parting left and right in a dizzying dazzle of colors, rather reminiscent of the psychedelic trip in that old science-fiction film *1002.* It was beautiful beyond belief, but I couldn't imagine the Captain inviting me up just for the view.

"We're moving faster than ever, Lieutenant," he said coldly. "But we finally have some idea of where we're headed. Look at the middle of the screen."

I did. At top center, among a host of lesser stars so dense they resembled the shimmering draperies of Earth's Northern Lights, shone one especially brilliant aquamarine star. Just below it, like a Rorschach blot on the screen, was a black emptiness, devoid of even pinpoint stars, and shaped roughly like the head and neck of a horse.

"The bright star is Zeta of the constellation Orion. It is sixteen

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hundred light-years from Earth. That's nine quintillion, four hundred-odd quadrillion statute miles, give or take a trillion or two. I wouldn't say you are very successfully getting us closer to home."

I asked weakly, "We're headed for that star?"

"Not quite. You'll notice the screen's crosshairs are centered below Zeta Orionis, on that empty black patch — a phenomenon known to astronomers, Lieutenant, as a dark nebula. This particular one is sometimes called the Horsehead Nebula."

For a change, he didn't sound accusatory, but I thought it best to say quickly, "I never aimed for it, Captain. I never heard of it."

"There are various theories," he went on, as if I hadn't spoken, "as to what a dark nebula *is*. Some pretty wild theories. One is that a dark nebula is an actual hole in space, caused by a great star's dying, imploding, collapsing inward and sucking space in after it. Any foreign body approaching should be dragged along like a wood chip down a whirlpool. To where, nobody knows."

I swallowed, and wondered where all my praying and PKing had gone wrong.

"Another theory is that a dark nebula is also a hole in space, but a kind of door leading to another continuum. Or into a Universe of antimatter. Or a mirror Universe to ours, whatever that would be like. Astronomers have been bandying these screwball theories for centuries. We're about to be the first to prove which one's right. Not that we'll ever tell. Not that we'll ever care, for that matter."

He sounded so weary and despairing that I said, almost in tears myself, "Sir, I had nothing to do with this. I've been concentrating on our deliverance, not our doom. I don't know where we're going or why. Captain Stormfield, I swear it by Heaven."

And Heaven is where we went.

Please do not cut off my transmission, whoever you are at the pulpit-console there on Earth. This is not a hoax; you must by now have a fix on the far but fast-approaching source of these signals. And this is not lunacy; hear me out and I'll prove it. I, Crispin Mobey — along with the other Corriganauts — have visited Heaven.

Of course, I'd been mistaken in telling Captain Stormfield that I had nothing to do with our arrival at this unlikely destination. Back when I'd done all my PK imploring that "the doors of Heaven be opened" and so forth, I had meant only, "Get us safely out of space and onto Earth" — using "Heaven" as a synonym for "space," you see, since the word "space" never once appears in the Bible. It could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hardly have occurred to me that the Almighty would take me literally.

It was a while, in fact, before we realized where we had wound up. As the Captain had predicted, the *Corrigan* slid into that empty, ugly, frightening, jagged dark hole among the stars. The view screen went as black as the looks the crew were all giving me while we waited for annihilation. Then, the ship slowing of its own accord, we saw on the screen a star the size and magnitude of our own Sol, then a planet orbiting about it, which could have been our own green, cloud-marbled home Earth. Still without direction either from the computers or myself, the *Corrigan* drifted down to this planet and went through the complicated process of landing. When the dust blown up by our down-thrust rockets had cleared, we truly thought that through some miracle — perhaps a crimp in space-time — we *were* back on Earth.

For the ship sat in the middle of an African savannah, a clear-skied, sunlit grassland, with the picture-postcardy Mount Kilimanjaro recognizable on the horizon. Not too far from the ship, we saw as we emerged, a multitude of animals roamed, apparently undisturbed by the uproar of our arrival. There were browsing giraffes, grazing zebras and — if this was Earth, there had indeed occurred a wrinkle in time — a herd of prehistoric triceratops, like overgrown rhinoceroses only far more fearsome, and flocks of prehistoric aepyornis, ostrichlike but thrice as tall as I am. Then, to compound the anachronistic ambience, there came strolling toward us through the tall grass a slender gentlemen clad in khaki shorts, a safari shirt, an old-fashioned pith helmet, and wearing Victorian mutton-chop sideburns. He walked straight to me and said:

"The Reverend Mobey, I presume?"

I could only gulp, as he wrung my hand and introduced himself with a noticeable Scottish burr: "Name of Livingstone, late of Glasgow and Ujiji."

"*The* Livingstone?" I gasped. "The Reverend Doctor David —"

"Och aye, the oft-missing missionary." He smiled shyly. "The verra same. I was bidden to greet ye, seeing as I was a quondam colleague of yours. And this would be your braw bricht flicht commander? Welcome to Heaven, Cap'n Stormfield."

The Captain, for once, was as speechless as I. Only Ms. Mammal was capable of squealing, *"Heaven?!* This is Heaven?"

"Awell, 'tis *my* Heaven," the late explorer said humbly. "Always happy in it, I was and I am."

"It's a very *nice* Heaven, sir," I said. "But ... er ..."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The Pearly Gates?" asked Dr. Livingstone, his eyes twinkling. "Saint Peter and his big Reigster of the Elect? They'll be on one of the other Airths, noo. Ye'll get to visit, as ye like, and sign in proper. Wear a halo and wings, if ye choose, and play a harp for etairnity. Or in a rock combo."

"Other Earths!" exclaimed Sparks. "Then Heaven is a swarm of alternate Earths?"

"Just so. To accommodate all the different souls' different ideas of Etairnal Bliss, ye ken. And all the different epochs they coom from. Take Africa here. This one's of my time and preference. There's a primeval one for Olduvai Man. And a hairy-chest Africa for White Hunters, wi' a frozen leopard carcass high on Kilimanjaro yon. And a *really* hairy Africa for the likes of Idi Amin. Of course, to avert an etairnity of boredom the more deserving souls and even the beasties" — he indicated the aepyornis flock — "visit around noo and again. But fear not, ye'll each get the Heaven ye yearn for. Or desairve. There's everything here, on one Airth or another, from Arthur's Round Table to the Algonquin's."

"We'd all like a tour of the facilities, sir, of course," I said. "But I daresay The Authorities will want us to depart as quickly as possible."

"Why so?" he asked offhandedly. "Why not stay for guid?"

"Well..." I couldn't think how to put it delicately. "Well, we're not dead."

He shrugged. "Ye're here. Ye'll get here again eventually. Why make the unco' long round trip? Simply settle and enjoy it."

"That would be most irregular," I said tartly. "Unprecedented. Unheard of. According to all I've been taught — and I believe I can speak for other faiths besides my own — we mortals must die in a state of grace to be worthy of entrance here. The same doubtless goes for every other form of life in the Good Lord's Universe."

Dr. Livingstone regarded us kindly and a little sadly. "Ever since your Airth sent the Viking scoots to ascertain that there's nae life on Mars, and ne'er has been, ye must have suspicioned..."

"That there's no life elsewhere in the Solar System," the Captain conceded. "But considering the infinite number of other likely suns and their planets..."

"Nae, Cap'n Stormfield. Every other is as barren of life as Mars. Ye'll find nae purple people nor wee green men in Heaven." He added gently, "In all the Univairse, only Airth is cursed wi' death."

We were all struck dumb for a moment.

"Aweel, since ye know noo that all Airthlings are bound for here," the Reverend Doctor resumed,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"and since ye know the route noo, ye might as well start a shuttle sairvice wi' your spaceships. Ye'll be saving folk all that dither of dying."

"That would absolutely empty Earth," murmured T-Square, adding an unintentional pun, "except maybe for a scattering of diehards."

"And that is precisely the Divine Plan," said Dr. Livingstone, stunning us again. "Did ye think it mischance or" — he glanced at me — "ineptitude that brought *ye* here? But hoots! Enough of this. Ye'll be wanting to look at your ain Heavens, and perhaps tour a few tasty altairnatives. Simply stand there and wish. There'll be a Jaycee waiting to escort the each of ye."

"J.C. himself!" I cried, ecstatic.

"Not bluidy likely, bless His name. Junior Chamber of Commairce. Verra enthusiastic young chaps, each eager to boost and promote his particular Paradise."

Aweel — I mean ah, well. That was a disappointment. But many were the tempting Heavens (or variegated Earths) we visited, severally and together, and many were the August Personages we met. Ms. Mammal raised such a fuss that she was finally even accorded an audience with "Ms. Virgin Mary." And, if you think about it — about the technicalities, I mean — the sainted Mary is, of all women in history, the only one really qualified and entitled to call herself "Ms."

Aweel — mean, uh, we'll all be expatiating on our experiences in detail during our Earthside debriefings. I will report only a conversation I held with Dr. Livingstone, who kindly acted as my personal escort (God save me from bromidic boosters and Babbitts) through my chosen Southern Primitive Protestant Heaven of neat white frame churches, perpetual summer Sunday and front-porch rocking chairs, fried chicken and iced tea and Divinity fudge, Monopoly and monogamy and monotony, and all the other virtues that we SoPrim Virginians so cherish and pray for....

"Aweel, now that ye ask aboot the Divine Plan," said my distinguished fellow missionary. "Airth and life and mankind were all an expeeriment, and it has fizzled. Dinna look fashed; ye canna deny it."

"No, sir. God knows the world is a mess. Where exactly did we go wrong?"

"Ye didna, lad. God did." I was staggered by this blasphemy, and here in Heaven, of all places. Surely a thunderbolt — but the Reverend Doctor went on, unblasted and irreverent: "Four of His words on Page One of Chapter One of Book One of the Holy Bible. 'Be fruitful and mooltiply.' No harm 'twas, spoken to a wee and beleaguered tribe of Israelites, but when the whole of mankind took it as Gos-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pel, puir thrawn Airth was doomed. Wars for elbowroom, wars over releegious intairpretations, wars for a mere enough to eat. Overpopulation, overproduction, overexploitation of resources. Pollution and corruption and all the rest of it. So finally, and almost too late, 'tis the Divine Plan to bleep the Airth the noo."

"To *bleep* the Earth?"

"Aweel, to tone it down, thin it out. Bring the Airthlings here where, just as there is no death, there is no birthing."

I swallowed and asked, "Bring them here? How?"

"You."

"Me?"

"And the revelation you'll take back. That there's nae need to die to get to Heaven. The quota's lifted. Yon doors are open. There'll be some that'll choose to stay on Airth, as your navigator said, but they'll have better sense than to mooltiply — and divide — as heretofore."

"Let us hope so," I said fervently. "For, don't you see, sir, the ones that'll stay will be the ones who know in their hearts that they're destined for Hell, not Heaven. Earth will become a rogue planet populated entirely by sinners and criminals and their progeny."

"You'll tell the world, and truthfully, that there is no Hell."

"*What?!* You mean Attila, Torquemada, Hitler — they're all *here?*"

"Aye. Every soul comes to Heaven, but each soul gets the Heaven it desairves. Imagine an Attila with no Huns to lead, a Hitler who's again and forever a hoosepainter. Heaven is nothing if not just in its rewards. Even on Airth, Brother Crispin, tell me, can ye conceive a more horrendous Hell than Saint Helena or San Clemente?"

I could not reply. My lifelong beliefs had all been rocked and wracked. Not wrecked, I devoutly hope, but suddenly I could comprehend that everything the good Doctor said must be true and irrefutable.

"Saint Peter," he went on, "is presently microdot-filming his entire Register of souls. You will pooblish it to all of Airth, so every living man, woman and bairn will know his doings in the days remaining to him, and the end thereof. Most will choose the spaceship shuttle wi'oot hesitation. Your ain *Corrigan's* chap called Dampers has already elected to stay. He's learned that on his verra next flight he's due to stand next to a lox tank leak and be congealed to an icicle. The rest of ye will all be gang back, they tell me. So... if ye're ready, Brother Crispin..."

An absent-minded Professor, of extremely untidy white hair and mustache, and oddly shod in two left shoes, one brown, one black,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

came alert long enough to work out for me the coordinates that would get us back to Earth — "Chust rememper, Mopey, at dis boint marked mit red *eggs*, you schtop der schlepping und decelerate!" — plus the coordinates that will bring the *Corrigan* and other ships to Heaven again. And again and again.

All us Corriganauts except Dampers are still aboard on this return voyage, most of the others declaring their eagerness to have the honor of crewing the shuttle run. Only the Captain is returning grumpy (and drunk), declaring it his duty to stand Court-Martial for mishandling his original mission. Silly sod. I have enlarged and read a selected few of St. Peter's microdots, and Captain Eli Stormfield is due to be more heavily bemedaled than any hero in world history....

Oh dear. He has just awakened from under the Sip-a-Nip and is snarling at me. We are almost at the bleeping point marked with the bleeping red *x*, and it is time for me to start concentrating on reentry maneuvers. I will close abruptly.

As I say, I have scanned some of the microdots, though (deliberately) not the page detailing the Last Days and Destiny of Crispin Mobey. Dr. Livingstone was assuredly right in predicting a mass evacuation of Earth for Heaven. But some people will choose to live out their lives and die their deaths on the new and different Earth to come. One of them will be me. If yesterday's world of little hope and faith had crying need of a dedicated missionary, how vastly much more will tomorrow's world — empty of mischief and mishap — require the continued presence of

Yours faithfully,
Crispin Mobey

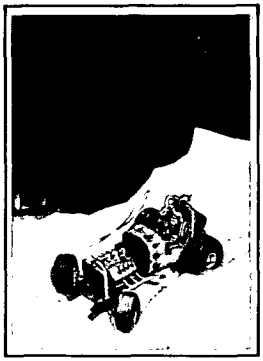
F&SF FOREIGN EDITIONS

We have limited quantities of the following foreign editions of *Fantasy and Science Fiction:* French, Spanish, Swedish and Portuguese. These are available while they last for $1.00 each or 3 for $2.00; price includes postage and handling.

MERCURY PRESS, Inc. PO Box 56, Cornwall, Ct. 06753

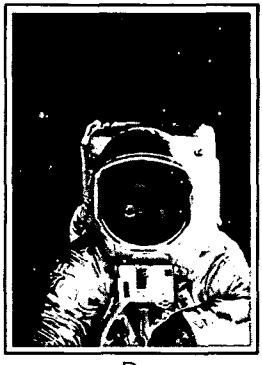
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A



B

C



D

Full-color posters of four exceptional F&SF covers

These are not press proofs; they are a special small run of prints on quality, heavy stock. The quality of color reproduction exceeds that of the original printed covers. There is no overprinting, and they are suitable for framing (size: 9 x 11½).

A - September 1968, Chesley Bonestell, "The Trifid Nebula."
B - January 1970, Mel Hunter, "Robot and dune buggy."
C - September 1970, Mel Hunter, "Robot at street crossing"
D - May 1971, Ron Walotsky, for "The Bear With the Knot On His Tail"

$2.00 EACH; THREE FOR $5.00; FOUR FOR $6.50

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION, Box 56, Cornwall, Ct. 06753

I enclose $_____. Send me the following cover prints: ___A___B___C___D

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

Add .50 for Canadian postage; $1.00 for other foreign countries.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fantasy and Science Fiction

MARKET PLACE

ART

FANTASY ART prints and posters by George Barr and others. Special edition art prints from the writings of Tolkien. Low cost, $2.50 to $4.00. Send stamp for complete info. WWM Enterprises, Box 38, Woods Cross, Utah 84087.

SPACE SHUTTLE WALLCHART, 21x48 inches, full color. $1.00. Cosmic Enterprises, Dept FA, Box 228, Kingston Springs, TN 37082.

BOOKS-MAGAZINES

SCIENTIFANTASY-specialist:-Books,-magazines.-Free catalog. Gerry de la Ree, 7 Cedarwood, Saddle River, N.J. 07458.

SPECIALISTS: Science Fiction, Fantasy, Weird Fiction, Books, Pocketbooks. Lists issued. Stephen's Book Service, Post Office Box 321, Kings Park, L.I., New York 11754.

Send for Free catalog of hardcover science fiction and fantasy books and pulps. Canford Book Corral, Box 216, Freeville, N.Y. 13068.

SF NEWSPAPER -4/$1. 220 Standish #1, Redwood Ca. 94063.

AMERICAN ATHEIST magazine. Send $1 to S.O.S. P.O. Box 2117, Austin, Texas 78767.

SF-FANTASY BOOKS for sale. Lists. Gordon Barber, 35F Minneapolis Ave., Duluth, MN.

BACK ISSUE MAGAZINES. Over 200 titles, 1890 to 1976. Send stamped envelope. Free list. *Everybody's Bookshop, Dept FA, 317 West 6th,* Los Angeles, Calif. 90014.

SF, FANTASY BOOK SEARCH. Send titles — we'll look. SPQR Books, Box 863, Middletown, Ct. 06457.

THE IMMORTALIST, newsletter of Cryonics Society of Michigan, publishes news of all medical and social advances relating to cryonics and immortality. Send $1 for sample. CSM, Box 584-A, Wilmette, Illinois 60091.

COMMUNAL LIVING Directory Plus Utopian Newspaper. Samples $1., Storefront, P.O. Box 1174 FS, S.F., CA 94101.

SF-FANTASY magazines, books, paperbacks. Lists free. Collections also purchased. Robert Madle, 4406 Bestor Drive, Rockville, MD 20853.

FREE CATALOG! Science Fiction and mystery books. Save to 70%. Spencer Books, P.O. Box 186, So. Laguna, CA 92677.

SF COLLECTOR contains articles, indexes, bibliographies, appreciations, etc. covering the entire fantastic field. Bi-monthly, SFC concentrates on capturing SF's history for today's *collector of yesterday's science fiction.* 5 issues - $5.00. Sample - $1.25. Grant Thiessen, 943 Maplecroft, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

PAPERBACKS out of print. Send wants. SASE. McCrae, 8120 Buttonwood, Citrus Heights, CA 95610.

WANTED: Laumer's Retief or Lafayette O'Leary books in hard cover. Write stating title and price to Macnutt, 1456 Rue St. Marc, Apt. 10, Montreal, Quebec, H3H 2G2, Canada.

Poetry Of The Macabre. Send S.A.S.E. Fantome Press, 720 N. Park, Warren, Ohio 44483.

COMPLETE SF-Fantasy-Horror Catalog. Books, pbs, fanzines, art, records, wargames. Discounts. Collector's Editions, Box 236, Vienna, MD 21869.

Directory of 306 free magazines. 90 subjects. Only $2.00. Golden Isle Gifts, Dept. 12, 6½ W. Sunnyslope, Ponce City, OK 74601.

HUGO WINNING ALGOL features Van Vogt, Pohl, Williamson, Lafferty, DiFate in the Spring 1977 issue. $1.95, two years $7.50. ALGOL, Box 4175F, New York, NY 10017.

1000+ SF and Mystery mags for sale. All mint. No dbls. Best offer over $200.00 plus postage. Mel Klozar, 913 Spring Road, Elmhurst, IL 60126.

TREK, the leading magazine for Star Trek and SF fans. A professional publication. Sample $2.50. TREK, 2500 Pennington, Houston, Tex. 77093.

FANTASTIC SPECULATIVE SCIENCE!! New book describes many devices!! Great reading & science-fiction ideas. $1.00 + 35¢ postage. Galaxy, 124 Oakridge Drive, Berlin, CT 06037.

Do you have something to advertise to sf readers? Books, magazines, typewriters, telescopes, computers, space-drives, or misc. Use the F&SF Market Place at these low, low rates: $5.00 for minimum of ten (10) words, plus 50 cents for each additional word. Send copy and remittance to: Adv. Dept., Fantasy and Science Fiction, P.O. Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLOTHING

F&SF T-SHIRTS. 100% cotton, navy blue with original magazine logo imprinted in white. Sm, med, large, extra-large. $4.50 each, Mercury Press, Box 56, Cornwall, Ct. 06753.

HYPNOTISM

Hypnotism Revealed. Free illustrated details. Powers, 12015 Sherman Road, North Hollywood, California 91605.

PERSONAL

DATES GALORE! Meet singles-anywhere. Call DATELINE, toll-free (800) 451-3245.

YOUR PRESENT TAXES CAN FINANCE YOUR DREAMS. Charters (Independent Chapters), Ministers and DD's available - legal and successful. Free Details. TACT - the Acquarian Church, 432F PCH, Hermosa Beach, CA 90254.

LOVELY MEXICAN GIRLS seek friendship, marriage. Photos, information free. "Latins", Box 1716-FA, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

Protect your life and valuables with Lifetime Engraved Medical and Tag Plates. 20¢ for postage/handling brings details; refundable with purchase. PLATE-MATE, RD 1, Georgetown, PA 15043.

BEAUTIFUL MEXICAL GIRLS needing American boy-friends. Details, Photos "Free." World, Box 3876-FAN, San Diego, CA 92103.

Handwriting analysis reveals personality and abilities. General analysis: $1. Comprehensive analysis: $10.00. C. Linne, Ga, 619 Stambaugh #7, Redwood City, CA 94063.

Philip: please call Rita. It's urgent.

PSYCHIC READINGS. Send small personal object and $10. Rev. C. Morgan, P.O. Box 391, Encinitas, CA 92024. Object returned with reading.

SCIENCE FICTION WRITERS

Workshop: Writing Science Fiction, George R.R. Martin, Summer of 1977. Contact: Director of Summer Session, Clarke College, Dubuque, Iowa 52001.

MISCELLANEOUS

ESP LABORATORY. This new research service group can help you. For FREE information write: AL G. Manning, ESP Laboratory, 7559 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90046.

JAPANESE Girls Make Wonderful Wives. We have large number of listings. Many interested in marriage. Only $1.00 brings application, photos, names, description, etc. Japan International, Box 156-FSF, Carnelian Bay, Ca. 95711.

PERSONALIZED BUMPER Stickers: *Your* Name, *Your* Clever Words, or Whatever. Small or Large Quantities! Newton, Box 339-FSF, Interlaken, N.Y. 14847.

FOREIGN EDITIONS OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION. COPIES of French, Portuguese, Japanese and Swedish editions available at $1.00 each, three for $2.00. Mercury Press, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753.

SLEEP-LEARNING concept originated in sf! Now widely used. Essay $1.00. Al Gipson, P.O. Box 742D, West Chester, PA. 19380.

OWN A Piece Of The Universe! Authentic Iron Meteorites from the Odesse Craters. $30.00 an ounce. Available only in 1, 2 or 3 ounce weights. Send check or money order to MULBERRY HOUSE, 522 Mulberry St., Plantsville, CT 06479.

STAR TREK FANS. Send 25¢ for catalogue of hundreds of Star Trek items to Vulcan Trading Post, Box 1617 F, Wayne, NJ 07470.

Persons interested in Antarctic settlement, write Legation of the Kingdom of West Antarctica, 2121 University Halls, Ithaca, NY 14853.

210 FREE PRODUCTS: Posters, Rockets, Monster eyes. Information: $2.00. Rocking Horse Press, Box 2156, Brooklyn, NY 11202.

On February 11, 1969, a record was found on a New York City elevator. It purports to have been recorded some 100 to 150 years from now. Copies may be purchased for $3.00. Send to: THE RECORD, Box 3011, New York, NY 10008.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INDEX TO VOLUME 52, JANUARY-JUNE 1977

Adams, Georgia F.: *Acrostic Puzzle* ....Feb. 158
Asimov, Isaac: Science
Discovery By Blink....Jan. 123
Asimov's Corollary....Feb. 102
The Magic Isle....Mar. 126
The Dark Companion....Apr. 144
Twinkle, Twinkle, Microwaves...May 132
The Final Collapse....June 111
Benford, Gregory: *Hellas Is Florida* (novelet)....Jan. 80
Bloch, Robert: *But First These Words* ....May 52
Nina....June 4
Boles, Paul Darcy: *The Wheels of God* ....Jan. 98
Budrys, Algis: *Books*....Jan. 71
Books....Mar. 27
Books....Apr. 35
Books....June 13
Clute, John: *Books*....Feb. 45
Competition:....Apr. 159
Coney, Michael G.: *Catapult To The Stars*....Apr. 90
Davidson, Avram: *Manatee Gal Ain't You Coming Out Tonight* (novelet) ....Apr. 111
DeCamp, L. Sprague: *Tiki*....Feb. 79
The Menhir....May 58
Dixon, J.P.: *The Final Close*....June 103
Eisenstein, Phyllis & Alex: *Altar Ego* (novelet)....Mar. 6
Eklund, Gordon: *Hellas Is Florida* (novelet)....Jan. 80
Etchison, Dennis: *On The Pike*....Mar. 115
Frede, Richard: *Mr. Murdoch's Ghost* ....May 144
Fritch, Charles E.: *Clang/ Clang! Clang! Went The Trolleybird*....Apr. 81
Goulart, Ron: *Lunatic At Large*....Feb. 87
Green, Joseph: *To See The Stars That Blind* (novelet)....Mar. 137
Guthridge, George: *The Exiled, The Hunted*....June 121
Jennings, Gary: *Not With A Bang But With A Bleep*....June 139
Lafferty, R.A.: *Thou Whited Wall*..Jan. 59
Leiber, Fritz: *The Pale Brown Thing* (novel) *Part 1*....Jan. 6
Part 2....Feb. 113
Leman, Bob: *Industrial Complex*...May 75
Malzberg, Barry N.: *Books*....May 45
Milton, Patrice: *To See The Stars That Blind* (novelet)....Mar. 137
Moore, Raylyn: *Man Volant*....May 88
Pearce, Gerald: *Twilight Reign* (novella) ....Mar. 46
Perlman, Al B.: *Logic Puzzle*....Mar. 158
Reamy, Tom: *The Detweiler Boy* (novelet)....Apr. 4
Reed, Kit: *The Holdouts*....June 80
Roberts, Keith: *The Big Fans* (novelet) ....May 6
Rokesmith, John Thames: *Writers Of The Purple Page* (novelet)....May 98
Runyon, Charles W.: *Daughter Of The Vine* (novelet)....Apr. 48
Russ, Joanna: *How Dorothy Kept Away The Spring*....Feb. 53
Searles, Baird: Films:
Futureworld Imperfect....Jan. 114
Fillet Of Solaris....Feb. 76
A Glass Galosh....Mar. 106
Beauty & Beast Redux....Apr. 86
Kings Kong And Arthur....May 71
Jolly Juvenalia....June 36
Shaw, Bob: *Dream Fighter*....Feb. 65
Shore, Wilma: *The Podiatrist's Tale* ....Apr. 43
Stacey, Joseph C.: *Atomic Terms* (Quiz)....Feb. 112
Stearns, Stephanie: *An Altogether Peculiar Summer*....Mar. 109
Tall, Stephen: *The Man Who Saved The Sun* (novelet)....Jan. 134
Thurston, Robert: *The Mars Ship* (novelet)....June 39
Tuttle, Lisa: *The Horse Lord*....June 90
Utley, Steven: *Losing Streak*....Jan. 117
Upstart....Feb. 61
Varley, John: *In The Hall Of The Martian Kings* (novella)....Feb. 6
Wilson, Gahan: *Cartoons*....Jan.-June
Yolen, Jane: *The Hundreth Dove*...Apr. 155
Young, Robert F.: *The Day The Limited Was Late*....Mar. 35
The Star Eel....June 22

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

READ IT SLOWLY.

You'll want to. It's that good . . . it's The Hugo Winners: 23 speculative fiction stories that have won the science fiction equivalent of the Oscar —Arthur C. Clarke's superb story, "The Star," Jack Vance's classic, "The Dragon Masters," and Poul Anderson's award-winner, "No Truce With Kings," plus 20 more.

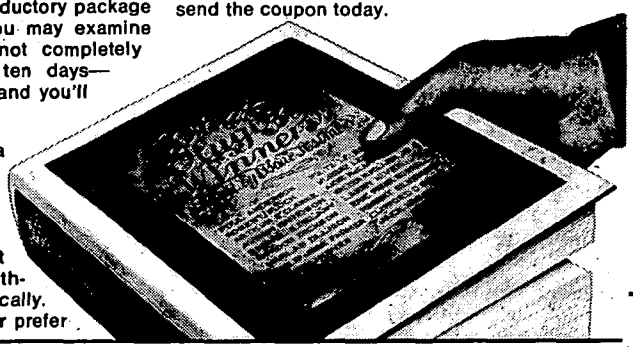
This fabulous 864-page anthology of speculative fiction sells for $15.45 in the original publisher's edition. It's yours, if you wish, as one of 4 books for just 10¢ (plus shipping and handling) when you join The Science Fiction Book Club.

Here's how the Club works:

When your application for membership is accepted, you'll receive your introductory package of four books for just 10¢. You may examine them in your home, and if not completely satisfied, return them within ten days—membership will be cancelled and you'll owe nothing.

About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), we'll send you the Club's bulletin, *Things to Come*, describing the 2 coming Selections and a variety of Alternate choices. If you want both Selections, you need do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically. If you don't want a Selection, or prefer an Alternate, or no book at all, just fill out the convenient form always provided, and return it to us by the date specified. We try to allow you at least ten days for making your decision. If you do not receive the form in time to respond within 10 days, and receive an unwanted selection, you may return it at our expense.

As a member you need take only 4 Selections or Alternates during the coming year. You may resign any time thereafter, or remain a member as long as you wish. At least one of the two Selections each month is only $1.98 plus shipping and handling. Other extra-value selections are slightly higher but always much less than Publishers' Editions. Send no money. But do send the coupon today.



ANY 4 SCIENCE FICTION BEST SELLERS FOR JUST 10¢ with membership

Science Fiction Book Club 45-S131
Dept. MR010, Garden City, N.Y. 11530

I have read your ad. Please accept me as a member in the Science Fiction Book Club.

Send me, as a beginning, the 4 books whose numbers I have indicated below, and bill me just 10¢ (plus shipping and handling). I agree to take 4 additional books during the coming year and may resign anytime thereafter. SFC books are selections for mature readers.

Mr.
Mrs.
Miss _____
Please print

Address _____ Apt. ____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

If under 18 parent must sign. Order not valid without signature.

_____

2915. **Star Trek Star Fleet Technical Manual.** Compiled by Franz Joseph. A must for all Star Trek devotees. Taken from the data banks of the master computer, it includes the Articles of Federation, the Romulan and Organian Peace Treaties, and much more. Large size paperback. Vinyl binder. Pub. ed. $6.95

7773. **Children of Dune.** By Frank Herbert. Second sequel to the Hugo and Nebula award-winning **Dune**, this is the final volume of this outstanding SF trilogy. Pub. ed. $8.95

6627. **Mirkheim.** By Poul Anderson. An exciting tale of intragalactic war and political intrigue. Pub. ed. $7.95

6221. **The Foundation Trilogy.** By Isaac Asimov. The ends of the galaxy revert to barbarism. An SF classic. Comb. Price $19.85

7682. **Mindbridge.** By Joe Haldeman. Mind expanding space travel by the author of **The Forever War**, the 1976 Nebula winner. Explicit scenes and language may be offensive to some. Pub. ed. $8.95

4614. **Millennium.** By Ben Bova. American and Russian bases on the Moon unite to prevent a catastrophic war brewing on Earth. Pub. ed. $7.95

7328. **Shadrach in the Furnace.** By Robert Silverberg. In the year 2012 a vicious plague is destroying the world while its ruler Genghis Mao jealously guards the only known antidote. Pub. ed. $8.95

4549. **Man Plus.** By Frederik Pohl. Cyborgs are to colonize Mars, and Roger Torraway, ex-astronaut, is to be the first Martian—or so NASA plans. Fast-paced fascinating SF. Pub. ed. $7.95

6320. **A World Out Of Time.** By Larry Niven. A black hole in space sends Jerome Corbell 3 million years into Earth's future where the ultimate battle of the sexes is raging. By co-author of **The Mote in God's Eye.** Pub. ed. $7.95

8532. **The Hugo Winners, Vol. I & II.** Giant 2-in-1 volume of 23 award-winning stories, 1955 to 1970. Asimov introduces each. Pub. ed. $15.45

1412. **Imperial Earth.** By Arthur C. Clarke. A representative to Earth, from Titan, Duncan MacKenzie plans to solve an invention that threatens his homeland's economy. By Hugo, Jupiter and Nebula winning author. Pub. ed. $7.95

4770. **Llana of the Gath and John Carter of Mars.** By Edgar Rice Burrough. Excellent 2-in-1 volume in the Burroughs Mars series. Special Edition.

The Science Fiction Book Club offers its own complete hardbound editions, sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save members even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Toronto. Offer slightly different in Canada.

LICENSED FOR PERSONAL USE
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED